



BAB AND
HER WINKLES

by

MES HENRY KEARY

Richmond Road Congregational Church

SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Year ending
Dec 31st 1903.

Presented to

Jennie Bright
having made 48 attendances
out of a possible 48.

Samuel Jones Superintendent.

P. G. Judd Secretary.

Date February 10th 1904.

BAB AND HER WINKLES



"Bab, I've set up as a 'brella mender!'"

[See page 25.]

BAB AND HER WINKLES

OR

The Eve of To-morrow

BY

MRS. HENRY KEARY

Author of "Deb," "Tinker Dick," "Hapless Harry," etc.

WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
THE OLD BLIND MAN AND HIS DOG DANDIE	9

CHAPTER II

BAB AND HER WINKLES	20
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

THE LUCKLESS DAY	30
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

THE TRACK OF THE STRAYED	39
------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

THE POLICE COURT	50
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIDE OF HONESTY	61
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

THE PAWNSHOP	75
------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT IN A DUST-BIN	86
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX

	PAGE
"I AIN'T NO DOG, NOR A YOUNG RASCAL"	97

CHAPTER X

THE BROKEN LINK	109
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER XI

TO THE RESCUE!	118
----------------	-----

BAB AND HER WINKLES

CHAPTER I

THE OLD BLIND MAN AND HIS DOG DANDIE



BOY was walking along one of the narrow side streets in the East End. He dragged one leg after the other, and no wonder, for he wore a pair of heavy leather boots much too large for him, old, shapeless boots, gaping at the toes, and not even laced up. They were once his father's, now he is dead; Peter, his only child, wore them because his own boots would no longer hold together. He left them in a gutter one day to be picked up by the first rag and bone man who chanced to pass that way.

Peter was some twelve winters old—not summers—his short space of life knew little or nothing of brightness and happy golden sunshine. Summer, with its joyous wealth of flowers and fruit, was an untold tale, a closed book, to

him. Now and then he picked up a poor castaway flower and cherished it, dipping it into the nearest drinking fountain, hoping to bring it back to life and beauty ; he never could, still he loved the faded thing and kept it.

Flowers one and all are tokens of God's ever living love for man.

A world without flowers—with only thorns and briars—would have been a far sadder world than it is. Even poor Peter without those stray picked-up blossoms would have led a duller and drearier life.

At first sight there was a weary, listless look about the boy, as if he cared little which way he went or what became of him ; presently a cheery whistle burst from his lips, a snatch of some popular street melody, and a kind of a smile like a pale, watery sun gleam spread over his face, He stopped, kicked off his boots, tied them together with the remains of the leather laces, and flung them across his shoulder ; he could get on much better without them, there was no damp for his naked feet to tread on, the pavements were dry, and quite warm with reflected heat. This done Peter pulled himself together, and walked on at a brisk pace, as if some pleasant idea had cropped up to cheer him, and so it had.

Yes, even for that poor boy there was something akin to joy. His was the joy bred of unselfishness, the joy of forgetting himself, the joy of doing something to make a fellow creature happy.

That is a joy within everybody's reach, if we would only believe it and try to do a kindness to somebody who needs it.

THE OLD BLIND MAN AND HIS DOG DANDIE II

"Be kind to one another,
As the Lord is kind to you."

Peter's hands were in his pockets, not for warmth, it was summer time, summer everywhere, except in those narrow, squalid streets. Sun rays very rarely strayed down there, or mingled with those haunts of misery and poverty. It was not God's fault ; God is love, He made His sun to shine on the evil and the good ; man built those narrow, crowded-together streets and endless courts and blind alleys.

Peter's hands were thrust deep down into those empty pockets of his, seeking for a solitary copper which he knew was lurking in some corner.

Not far off there was a baker's shop ; the delicious smell of new bread filled the air, the oven had just been drawn ; how tempting it smelt ! He stopped in front of a small bow window ; it was full of fresh bread and buns and lardy cake cut in slices ready for sale ; round the window ranged on narrow shelves stood glass bottles full of lollipops and peppermints and sweeties of every sort. Peter's up-turned eyes rested on these ; a penny would buy such a lot ! He stopped whistling for the moment, the smile, too, died out of his face ; it soon came again, like the sun coming out from behind a cloud on a fitful April day. His eyes have dropped from those bottles down on to the buns and bread and cakes ; he is thinking and calculating—as far as his scanty learning will allow, and lend him help—calculating to a nicety how far his one penny will go.

Peter almost persuaded himself that looking at and

smelling all the tempting things was very nearly as good as eating them. It would not pay to stand there all day, so he went inside the shop ; a woman stood behind the counter, and a girl about his own age, only considerably shorter ; how he envied that child living every day and all day long in that delicious, steamy atmosphere of hot buns and cakes ! It was only natural, he could not help himself. Peter did not speak. The woman, judging from his ragged appearance, thought that, like so many other boys, he had only come in to beg, so she said,—

“ We can’t be giving things away all day long ; if we did I should like to know how in the name of fortune we are to get our own living. Our stale bits are all gone, and not a scrap of anything, nor even a bun, left. I often say to my girl, Liza-Loo, ‘ It makes my life miserable to refuse food to poor starving boys ; but I can’t help it, for these be hard times with small tradespeople like me.’ ”

Peter gave no heed to her remarks ; perhaps he did not take in all she said ; at all events, with the pride of honesty, the pride of being able to pay—he had the money in his hand—he asked how much the buns were, and the price of the small loaves and the slices of cake.

“ Buns, my dear ? the small ones a ha’penny and the big ones a penny. The loaves is a penny each too. If you’re hungry—I dare say there’s nothing inside of ye—there’s a deal more heart in bread than there is in them buns, just puffed up, as you may say, to make the most of themselves ; but there, ’tisn’t to be expected that boys should think of what’s good and wholesome. Ten out of a dozen as comes in ’ll buy buns or cake, and won’t so much as look at the

bread. The cake is a penny a slice; which is it to be, eh?" She had caught sight of Peter's penny.

"I was thinking," said Peter.

"Thinkin', was ye? Law! my dear, 'tisn't often boys think; they comes in, snatches up a bit of cake, or summat, turns on their heels, and are off out of the shop almost before you've picked up the copper. What was it you were puzzling and thinking about, my dear?"

"I was wondering which he'd like best."

"Who's *he*, my dear? your father, or grandad, or——?"

"I haven't got neither of 'em; father's dead and mother too, and I never heard tell of a grandad. I haven't got nobody to belong to, except 'tis the old blind man; I ain't nothin' to him really, but he's real kind, and let's me call 'im uncle 'cause he's got nobody to look after him no more than me, only 'tisn't quite like havin' a father."

"That's true, my dear; a father, if he's a good one, ain't like nobody else, and can't be picked up every day."

"Father was reg'lar good, that he was." Peter drew something between a deep sigh and a sob as he spoke. "He and I used to mend a lot of old 'brellers.' He'd sit down most anywhere and do 'em, 'cause we lived in an underground room; 'twas dark for workin' in, and candles cost money; 'twas cold and damp when 'twas high tide, and the water comed in for a hour or so; we didn't mind it, we put our legs up on a bench and went on wi' our work. Father kept his tools and the 'brellers' on a shelf; they was safe and dry up there. I haven't got no home now. One day father was took ill and died. I heard 'em say 'twas the damp and cold got hold on 'im; 'twasn't long

ago, just back in the winter when the water comded in worse than ever."

"Whatever did you do, my dear, when you was left all by yourself? I do wonder they didn't clap ye into the poor-house."

"I runned away and went ever so far from the place. I couldn't stop without father, 'twas so lonesome,—the old umbrellas in the corner of the room, just where father put 'em, starin' me in the face."

"I don't expect you could, poor boy. However do you manage to keep yourself a-goin'? There, as I say, a boy, if he've got his wits about him, gets into his breeches, and then can most times earn an honest penny; and mind it is always an *honest* one."

"Oh; I does a little umbreller mending, only 'tisn't often folks likes to trust them with me. Somehow father knew he was goin', so says he, 'Peter, I've taught ye how to do it, so mind you goes on wi' your trade when I'm gone; 'twill keep you from starvin'.'"

"And so it has, by the looks of ye. Not but what you're a morsel young to trust with a real good umbrella. I've got an old cotton one that won't open nor yet shut. I shouldn't mind letting ye have it, just to find out what's the matter with it. I can't give it to you now, I haven't got it anywhere handy, and it's just the time folks come in for their bread; but if you're along here some other day it will be ready for you. There won't be any great damage done if you spoils it."

"Sometimes I buys an old one for sixpence. I takes off the old torn *cover*, polishes up the whales, cleans the

stick, rubs up the metals, and then I sells the lot for a shillin', if so be I'm lucky ; and so I goes on a-buyin' and sellin' and mendin'."

Peter paused, and fixed his eyes on the buns.

"Well, I never ! You have got an old head on young shoulders ! But how about the buns ? Is it to be a loaf, or a slice of the lardy cake, or a penny bun ? You're never going to give it to the old blind man ! I'll wager he's a deal better to do than you are. Law ! he and that dog of his pick up a lot of coppers between 'em ; and as I said before, I haven't a doubt yer own stomach is empty enough."

"I wants it for uncle ; he's awful good to me, and often gives me a crust."

"I know old Figis ; he sits at the corner round by St. Swithin's Church ; his dog catches the coppers in his mouth."

"Yes, that's he ; Dan's a awful clever dog, he is ; people throws a copper at him just to watch him catch it and take it to his master."

"Dearie me ! He's sat there for years and years ! I can't remember, not exactly, when he first came there. We was married at St. Swithin's Church, he was there then, and that's twenty years ago come Christmas time. My husband gave him some rice, for, poor fellow,—he's dead and gone,—he didn't believe in such rubbish about its being lucky. He said he wouldn't have good food thrown after us and wasted, so he went himself and gave it to the blind man instead."

"I most days goes and sees him," said Peter. "He'll

be expectin' me to-day, 'cause it's his birthday. I guess he'd like a penny bun best."

"All right, my dear; you can take one out of the window for him and one for yourself; it won't ruin me once and again to give away a fresh bun, and 'twill sort of encourage you to act kind to others."

Peter put down his penny on the counter, thanked the woman, and pulled the front lock of his rough hair respectfully. He was proud as a peacock, with a bun in each pocket!

"You won't forget to call for the umbreller, my dear? Mind I'm 'M. Cobb, baker': it's written over the window."

Peter did not stop to reply, but ran off as fast as he could, whistling all the way.

He found the old blind man sitting in his usual place at the corner of the street. It was a first-rate position, as it gave him a kind of double chance: people came both ways, up one street and down the other. They could not help noticing him as they passed, with his dog Dandie in front of him, keeping a sharp look-out for coppers. Dan's expression was irresistible, with one ear cocked up and his head on one side. He was a handsome, well-bred dog into the bargain; he came into the blind man's service when he was quite a puppy. Many a time gentlemen had offered to buy him, but no money would tempt his master to part with him. Like most dogs and everybody else, Dandie had his faults: one serious failing was his love of cat hunting; he would steal out in the evening from the house where the blind man put up, and chase the cats from street to street, in and out of yards or anywhere he could find an

entrance. He was a masterful dog, and would have his own way when the duties of the day were over. No doubt his roaming propensities were part of his nature ; he could not get on without "his regular exercise," as the old blind man expressed it. Be this as it may, the habit was a source of constant anxiety and a real trouble to his master, who could not look after him. He was so afraid something would happen to Dandie and that he would never come back again. The poor old man's fears were not far wrong

Peter very soon reached the blind man's corner. Dandie at once caught sight of him ; he was always on the look-out. He wagged his tail, and tried to attract his master's attention by whining and barking. The poor old man turned his head. His sense of hearing was very keen. He was sure he heard Peter's whistle. Even amidst the din of passing vehicles and the dull, monotonous roll of far-off traffic, he could plainly distinguish the sound of Peter's whistle and his footstep as he came near.

In another minute Peter was sitting down by his side on the pavement, with Dandie sniffing round and round him. The dog soon found out there was something very nice in Peter's pockets.

"Where have you been, boy ? It's late. Mending umbrellas, eh ? "

"No, I haven't been doin' nothin' of that sort. I haven't got none to mend. I guess I've done most all of 'em as wants doin'. I've been and got you a bun, uncle, 'cause you said to-day was your birthday. Somehow I guessed you'd like to have a treat. Father always saved up a copper to giye me a cake. A lot of money it must

have cost him, 'cause I'm twelve and over. Father never forgot, not even when he was real hard-up."

"The Lord bless the boy!" As he spoke the old blind man drew the back of his hand across his eyes to wipe away his tears. The boy's kindness had touched his heart, and brought tears to his poor sightless eyes. Peter's was unaffected goodness of nature and real sympathy.

He stroked the boy's capless head, and said:—

"Peter, I wish I could have you with me always. If I'd the money to keep you I would, but I haven't. Dandie does all he can for me. I ain't ungrateful, but a dog can't talk; 'tisn't to be expected of the poor dumb animal. I talk to him till I'm tired of hearing my own voice. It's pleasant to listen to the sound of anybody's voice when you can't see the sunshine nor nothing. You don't feel so lonesome like, nor so shut up with your own thoughts, a kind of prisoner for life. Peter, boy, I hope you'll never know what blindness means. But there, even I've got my mercies. A lot of folks is kind to me, and I've got Dandie. The dog took to me from the first. As the sayin' is, he's one of a thousand. My lot would be a dull one without him. I won't eat yer bun, Peter; you must want it bad enough yourself. 'Tisn't much ever passes your lips, I'm certain."

"You must have it," said Peter, shaking his head. "I don't feel a morsel hungry; besides, the woman gave me one for myself."

"You won't lose your reward, child. 'A full reward be given thee of the Lord.' That's my prayer for ye, Peter."

Peter cared nothing for reward. He was amply satisfied to see the poor blind man eat and enjoy the nice new bun. Peter enjoyed his share of the birthday feast quite as much and more. Dan had a bit, too, you may be very sure of that.

CHAPTER II

BAB AND HER WINKLES



ETER did not forget the woman's umbrella ; it was not likely he would. With him pence were scarce that day and every day, and jobs too ; besides, the buns had made a lively and lasting impression on his memory. They were so "rattlin' good," as he expressed it ; not that he expected to have any more given him, for she had made him understand it was only just for one and for once.

Early one morning—it was the very next—off he sped through the grey, thick mist, up and down and along the narrow, squalid thoroughfares. People were just opening their shops. For the most part they were small and unimportant, and well suited to the locality. The men yawned dreamily and drearily as they took down the shutters, as if they were tired of the monotony of their every-day life. Their briskest trade, if, indeed, it could ever be called brisk, was in the evening. Then a good many people were about, and for the moment, at all events, the dulness and squalor seemed to be crowded out.

By the time Peter reached the baker's shop it was well

open. Mrs. Cobb was standing behind the counter, just as if she had not moved since he saw her there the day before. The old umbrella was ready, and waiting for him in a corner.

As he entered the shop the woman said, with an air of self-satisfaction,—

“I’m glad you’ve come, my dear, that I am, for Liza-Loo, that’s my eldest girl, wouldn’t believe me. Says I to Liza-Loo, ‘I’ll warrant he’ll be back all right. A boy that will give away his bun when he’s starving with hunger himself to a man that’s nothing in particular to him, not his father nor nothing of that sort,’ says I to Liza-Loo, ‘*that* boy’s word is worth more than a rotten apple, it is.’”

Mending Mrs. Cobb’s umbrella was a job that did not promise to do Peter’s powers much credit, for it had seen a good deal of service, and in her futile attempts at opening it the metals had run through the cotton covering and torn it in several places. He could not mend these; he could only do his best to make the old thing open and shut. He could not be expected to do more.

Peter had no settled home, and rarely a bed at night, so of course he had no place in which he could do his work. The nice, sunny, open space where the old blind man always sat would be just the place to choose for it. They would keep each other company, and Peter could look sharp after Dandie, and see that he caught all the pence that were thrown at him for his master.

Peter had some distance to walk. That did not matter; it would all go out in the day’s work.

Presently a wild little figure with a still wilder little face came in sight. She was bare-headed, her dark, unkempt hair, tossed by the breeze, fell over her face and neck. Folks called her a fish-girl, for she traded in winkles. Her father was a fisherman, but he was drowned in a storm years ago, before Bab could talk or walk, leaving her and her mother to keep life alight in their bodies as best they could. Bab was twelve years old, lightly and airily dressed, a gaping frock, with no buttons to speak of to keep it together, on her feet an old pair of shoes ; the upper leathers had parted from the soles, so with each step as she walked along they opened and shut. Somehow this did not seem to be any hindrance to her springing footsteps. Peter had not noticed her. Girls are quicker and have far more observation than boys. Their wits are sharper. She saw him the moment he came round the corner on the opposite side of the street. His woe-begone face and figure touched the impulsive child's heart. He looked quaint and old before his time as he shuffled on with the large old cotton umbrella under his arm. She had left off calling, "Wink! Wink O!" and was going to sit down on a doorstep to eat her early meal. She and Peter had been *friends*, yes, friends for many of their few years, and had oftentimes helped each other when hard times had befallen either of them. Peter had not observed her, but his ears soon caught the ring of her clear voice as she called to him and bid him come over and share her food. A tear stood in the child's fine eyes as she watched poor hungry Peter's pleasure when he saw her can of hot peas ready peppered and salted.

"It's a ha'peth, Peter. The man was stingy and mean, and didn't give me good measure. I made him do it, though, and give 'em another sprinkling out of the pepper pot. Wasn't it lucky I was up to his cheating? for now there's lots for you and me. I call hot peas dainties, I do. Don't stand looking at 'em, Peter; eat 'em before they gets cold and hard."

"It's awful good, Bab," said poor Peter, turning the hard, hot peas round and round in his mouth. It seemed to him a pity to swallow them too quickly. "Don't it remind you of the soup we gets winter times? It do me."

Peter had a kind of vague remembrance of the savoury smell of onions and stewed down bones and meat in the large soup kitchens, where he was sometimes lucky enough to find himself when somebody had given him a ticket. "I wish 'twas winter again, Bab; don't you? There's no soup nor nothin' goin' now."

"No, I don't, Peter." Bab shrugged her shoulders and shivered at the idea. "These here boots of mine would let in the snow; besides, 'tis so nasty and slippery, and the pavements so cold, and the fogs can't float about, but they stops and freezes, and don't never rise; it's just horrid. I loves summer evenings, 'cause mother and I walks out. She says 'tis worth walkin' a good pair of shoes off your feet, if we had any, but we never have, to go and see the big, round moon shining out of the sky, ever and ever so high above our heads. It's full to-night, so mother and I are going ever so far to a big graveyard to little Bobby's grave. He was my baby brother, mother says.

I can't 'zactly see how he is, 'cause he was born and died afore I was born. But o' course mother knows best, and she says he's my brother still, and that he ain't dead, but gone home behind the sky where the moon is hanging. I dare say he've got a nicer room for his home than we've got. Mother says to-night is the night when the moon shines straight down on Bobby's grave. She named me Bab 'cause it's something like Bobbie. How hungry you do look, Peter! There's more peas down at the bottom; I can't eat another."

"I haven't had no breakfast," said Peter, half aloud.

Peter almost wished he was going with Bab and her mother that evening, but he didn't feel quite sure he should care to be in the big graveyard, with the large, full moon not only shining on Bobby's little green mound, but looking right down on him. Somehow Peter always fancied it could see right through him. Even then a cold shiver ran down his back at the thought of it. In the moonlight all the tall, white tombstones seemed to be wandering about. Peter forgot that when the moon is high up and bright objects are not easily defined, and that everything seems to move hither and thither amid the flickering shadows.

"I say, Peter!" exclaimed Bab, catching sight of the old umbrella. Peter had flung it down on the pavement whilst he devoured the hot peas. "I say, Peter! What's up now? You with a 'brella! Why, it don't rain, nor the sun shine. 'Brellas is for gentlefolks and such-like, and not for we who never has any clothes to spoil."

Bab pouted out a pair of coral-red lips, and spread out her unwashed fingers in mock derision.

“ ‘Tisn’t mine, Bab ; I’ve got it to mend.” Peter added quite confidentially, “ Bab, I’ve set up as a ‘ ‘brella mender.’ Father was one, and he’ve left his business to me.”

“ Queer sort of work for a small chap like you, Peter. To my mind your new-fangled scheme sounds like a joke, only you look as if it was a real thing. All right. I’m off!”

Bab caught up her basket of winkles, and in another minute started off with a free, light step, crying, “ Wink! Wink O !” at the highest pitch of her clear voice.

Peter watched her till she turned the corner and he could see her no longer ; the sound of her voice echoing in the morning air still floated towards him ; it grew fainter and fainter, then died away and left him alone with his old umbrella and his own thoughts.

He stood quite still, almost lost in thought ; he was prone to turn things over in his mind. Somehow he had not half the spirit in him that he had before he met Bab. He felt almost ready to throw the umbrella into the gutter. She laughed at him and it, and called it a new-fangled scheme ; this had upset him, and was disheartening just as he prided himself on having made a fair start in the trade. Bab could afford to be light-hearted ; besides, that was her nature ; nothing seemed to be able to drive the sunny smile from her lips and those large, lustrous, light-bearing, dark eyes of hers, or to put a drag on her springing step. But then, as Peter was saying to himself, she

had a mother, whilst he had nobody belonging to him ; and she had a home, such as it was ; he was obliged to get a night's shelter anywhere, unless he had been lucky enough to earn a few coppers to pay for a bed. Often the sky overhead was his home-roof ; no wonder he envied Bab with her wild light-heartedness.

A clock not far off struck ten ; it warned him that the old umbrella would never be mended nor the money earned if he stood still much longer thinking and envying Bab's small, precarious stock of happiness.

Peter's mind was soon diverted from the dull course it had fallen into. Mercifully the thoughts of the young are easily changed and rarely rest on the shadows of this life, and are happily blind to all but the immediate present.

Before very long Peter came in sight of the old blind man ; there he sat, as usual, with a card hanging from his neck, on which was written in large black letters "Blind" ; but there was no dog ! Where could Dandie be ? The poor old man's head was thrown far back ; Peter noticed his cheeks glittered in the sunshine as if they were wet—and no wonder, for his sightless eyes were brimming over with fast-coming tears, and all the time he was talking to himself—so Peter thought.

"What ails ye, uncle ?" asked Peter, running up close to him. "What ails ye to be scanning up aloft and to keep a-mutterin' to yourself all the while ? Where's Dandie ? What's the dog a-doin' and a-thinkin' of to leave ye all alone ?"

"Oh, Peter, my child, well may you ask that ! Dandie's gone ! I was just tired of thinking and thinking where-

ever he could be, so I was putting up a few words of silent prayer to ask the Lord in mercy to send back Dandie. The Lord is good to poor blind people, He always was. He leads 'em by a way they know not, so perhaps——”

“Dandie isn't *really* gone, is he?” interrupted Peter.

“Yes, he is, Peter, worse luck. 'Twas last evening. I was sittin' a-smokin' my pipe, as usual, in a warm corner in the common room of the lodging-house, with Dandie fast asleep at my feet; all at once he wakes up. I s'poses he smelt the cats outside or heard 'em; he always was a terrible dog for cats; if he was dead I believe if anything would bring him to life again 'twould be a cat. Well, 'twas all done in a moment; up starts Dandie and away he goes straight out of the door into the street—the doors in such places are never kept shut. Off goes Dandie, I could hear him bark plain enough; I listened, and the bark seemed to grow fainter and fainter as he chased the cats further and further away. I didn't think nothing of that, for he've done it scores of times and has always come back; but he didn't this time, so I went to the door and crept along the street as best I could, whistling, and calling ‘Dandie! Dandie!’ but never an answer came. Most times before he'd bark, or whine, or cry, or something just to let me know he heard me and was all right; but there wasn't a sound of nothin' of the sort last night. I sat up till near morning a-listening, but Dandie never came back. He's stolen, Peter, he's stolen, I'm most sure he is. Lots of people knew he was worth a deal of money, so they won't kill him; but the dog will

break his heart, and mine will break too. Folks will call me foolish, for, after all, they'll say, he is only a dog—nothin' but a dumb animal ; they don't know what he was to me, nor what it is to be blind and have nobody belonging to you to speak to. Dandie was real good company, that he was. And now I haven't got my fiddle either ! A fiddle sort of speaks to you—that is, if you love it as I did mine ; dear, dear, it was just a reg'lar friend to me ! ”

“ Your fiddle couldn't run away like Dandie,” put in Peter.

“ No, no ; I was fo'ced to part with it. I put it away when my poor old missus died, I couldn't a-bear for the poor soul to be buried by the parish and be carried off in a big black box on wheels. Since then I've never been able to get money enough to fetch it out of pawn, and never shall ; and now Dandie's gone ! We can't die but only when 'tis His time, and 'tis best to die a-doin' your duty ; but now I'm left all alone ; if it would please the Lord, and 'twasn't clean runnin' against Providence to wish it, if 'twould please the Lord, I should be that glad if He'd take me. I'm 'most tired of living in the dark, thinking of bygone times ; with me,—

‘ It's time to be old,
To take in sail.’ ”

“ Have ye looked everywhere for Dandie ? ” asked Peter, who took more interest in hearing about the dog than listening to the poor old man's doleful aspect of life.

“ No, boy ; worse luck I can't *look* for him ; but I've

called and whistled for him, but nothin's no good ; if he was anywhere handy he'd have found his way back here by this time. He's tied up, or sent away, or——”

“Uncle !” exclaimed Peter excitedly, “I'll go and look for Dandie. There's nobody knows him as well as I do ; I'll go whistling and peepin' into every hole and corner—'tisn't many 'scapes my eye, 'cause, don't ye see, I'm 'most always in want of a snug, out-of-the-way place for sleepin' in, sort of ins and outs and behinds where the bobbies don't think of spying into : them's just the nooks and niches where Dandie's hid away.”

For a moment Peter was silent, evidently considering ; his eyes were fixed on the old umbrella. At last a thought struck him.

“I'll go, uncle ; only you just mind my 'brella——”

“What, boy ! your umbrella ? Whatever do you want with a umbrella ?”

“It ain't my own, nor borrowed. I've got it to mend. It's all askew, and I'm a-goin' to set it straight. That's he, you hold him tight, or else somebody may steal it ; and I'll bring back Dandie—dead or alive.”

“My poor Dandie ! I wish ye mid, but you won't.”

CHAPTER III

THE LUCKLESS DAY



NOTHING could turn aside the gloom of the poor old man's heart. All hope of seeing Dandie again had died within him.

After Peter left him he sat the picture of despair with his head bent over both his hands, and the old umbrella under his feet—it was quite safe there.

The sight of his grief touched many a passer-by; some stopped, those who were familiar with his figure, and asked for Dandie and why he was so troubled. All felt sorry for him and sorry to miss his clever dog; no one had heard or seen anything of him. Some folks with coarser, rougher minds and blunted feelings told him "worry wouldn't bring him back nor money neither, for they'd warrant he was sold for his skin—'twould make first-rate caps; and he himself 'ud cut up well for sausages, better meat a deal than cat's flesh." Miserable comforters all of them! He let them talk on, but never heeded what they said.

Pity or no pity, that evening there were more coppers in his box with a slit in it, which was fastened round his

waist with a leather strap, than he had found for many a day.

Peter was soon threading street after street. Presently heavy clouds which had hung overhead for some time, but which some people reckoned to be only the fog clearing off, broke in torrents of rain and loud, rolling claps of thunder; in a moment the roofs were washed, bespattering passers-by with sooty water, and the gutters were filled,—running streams of mud and refuse. People rushed to the nearest shelter; close at hand was an archway; beneath this Peter and several people cowered. As he scanned the aspect of each he wondered if either of them knew anything of Dandie; it wasn't so very far from the place where the blind man lodged. There were two girls with a rough, half-thievish look—they weren't the sort to steal dogs; and another girl with a pale, toil-worn face, as if she had seen nothing but the sad side of life; she wore a shabby, black stuff dress, more like brown than black now, with dry, hay-toned hair. She did not look as if she could steal or harm anybody; her own history was burden sufficient for her aching heart. Next to Peter stood a cobbler in a greasy black alpaca coat buttoned tight up to his chin. Nobody knew what was or was not concealed under it; still, there didn't seem to be anything besides his own bundled-together bones, a pair of old boots under his arm ready to be mended—not a paying job, evidently, but by the twisting of his fingers and thumbs they were aching to be at work to earn money to buy food for those gaping little mouths at home. Once he had said, "The more the merrier!" that was when the second baby

saw the light; by this time the merriment had all died out of the romance. Peter calculated that dog's skin wouldn't come amiss to him. He didn't stay long enough for Peter to look him through and through; he seemed to dive under the torrents of rain and disappeared.

An unmistakable cadger elbowed himself into the vacant space where the cobbler had stood. He fixed his eyes on Peter, and stared at him just as one would stare at a bull to keep him at bay; possibly he noticed that Peter was eyeing his pockets, which were suspiciously full and bulged out of all shape. 'Had he got Dandie in there? He might; Peter had often seen men take two or three dogs out of their side pockets. He whistled and in an undertone said, "Dandie, Dandie"; but there was no movement in the big pockets, not a breath to swell them out or draw them in. Peter's spirits were rising with the excitement of hunting for the poor dog: his aimless, every-day life had been so dull—storm or calm, rain or shine were all alike to him to-day. Hadn't he promised, all but sworn, he would bring back Dandie either dead or alive?

Peter would have done well to have spoken to the police about the dog; he never thought of that. Besides, he wasn't too fond of attracting their notice; he hated the sight of a bobby. Not that he was by any means an evildoer, but the police were a terror to him, and made the cold shivers run down his back. The storm soon passed over, and the thunder no longer rolled and rolled over the blackened roofs and tall chimneys, so Peter once again started off. On and on he went. Now the houses grew higher and the streets narrower, then he passed through

narrow alleys leading to still narrower streets, almost the only sound the resounding of his own footsteps. Then came the clattering and shouting of half a dozen figures, as they rushed out of one alley into another across the street—a dishevelled lot, with neither bonnets nor hats, evidently bent on taking part in, or quenching, a neighbour's quarrel. Peter did not heed them: his quest was Dandie. If folks quarrelled and fought they must settle it among themselves.

Next came a more open space, with a yard, high fenced, and large solid gates, which were wide open now. Yards, where casks, and barrels, and cases, and old orange boxes, and crates, and old timber, and all kinds of unused materials were stowed away, were just the places to suit Peter's quest. Peter knew such places almost by heart, for he had often hidden himself away there and slept—slept, as sound as a top, inside a crate. A large crate, half filled with hay, or straw, or shavings, was no bad thing for a homeless boy. But it wasn't a bed he was looking for and wanting now, it was Dandie. It happened to be just the time of day when all the men employed in the yard had gone away for dinner, all except one man, who was left to keep watch. There he sat, in his shirt sleeves and white apron, on the top of a cask, his pipe in his hand, fast asleep, dreaming he was awake and doing his duty all right. The same thing happened most days. He never over-slept himself, but was quite on the alert, with his eyes open, when the men came back to the yard. That is how it fell out that Peter had the place to himself. He moved about as quietly and stealthily as any cat,

creeping in and out, and peeping under everything. He whistled softly, and called "Dandie, Dandie," in a low voice, but nothing came of it. Once he heard a dog bark and rattle his chain behind the palings ; but it wasn't the bark of Dandie, it was too rough and loud. The dog, no doubt, was barking at Peter ; he knew he was trespassing, and had no business there. Unluckily the noise awoke the watcher. Peter saw him stretch himself and heard him yawn—yes, heard him, it was so loud. It warned Peter that the men were due, so he crept along behind the tall casks and cases, and ran out of the big gates into the street. He just looked back once ; the man was still sitting there, but smoking his pipe now. He had not noticed Peter ; worse luck, he had seen nothing of Dandie ; and so the luckless day wore away. Tired and disappointed, Peter had nothing to do but to go back to the old blind man.

The moon was well up, shining brightly over the blackened roofs and amidst the forest of chimneys and chimney pots, the wet streets here and there reflecting its cold rays.

An organ was playing at the corner where the old man sat. He was listening to it ; the music, bad as it was, helped to divert his thoughts. He knew the tune ; he used to play "The Lost Chord" on his fiddle. Other persons stood round the organ, and listened with open mouths, as if they had never heard one before. One woman had her baby in an old orange box on two wheels. The child's frock was dingy and tattered. The poor little thing, half asleep, was winking and blinking alternately

at the full pale moon and a sickly gas-lamp, that flickered bravely to keep itself alight. The baby was evidently trying to take in the scene; its experiences were limited. Peter cared for none of these things; very soon, too, the baby's head sank on one shoulder, and it fell asleep with a fading smile on its lips.

Peter was in no humour for anything. What with weariness, and hunger, and the sense of failure, he felt, as he said to himself, he could cry like a kitten; but he didn't. The old man was kind to him, and gave him some coppers to buy some food, and, oh! rare luxury, to pay for a night's lodging.

"Never mind, Peter; never mind, my boy," said the old man, stroking Peter's rough head of hair; "never mind. It's what we suffers does us good. Folks do say, 'Pains makes saints.' "

There was the old umbrella staring Peter in the face, still under the feet of the blind man. It looked as if it had a right to claim Peter's pity and attention, as it lay there, in the sickly yellow glimmer thrown by a gas-lamp down on the pavement. His interest in it had well-nigh died out; still, it could not remain uncared for where it was. Clearly something must be done with it; but not mended until Dandie turned up all right. He could not be carrying it under his arm all the day through and all the night long. It was a heavy, lumbering bit of goods, and a great hindrance to his getting about.

By-and-by a bright idea struck him—if he met Bab, he would ask her to take it to her mother's room, and leave it in a corner until he came for it. He did not come across

Bab; it was too late for her to be crying, "Winks! Winks O!" Bab had sold them all and gone home, only, of course, Peter did not know that. There was nothing to be done but to go himself. Bab's mother—he knew her by no other name—Bab's mother would not mind it. He had been there often before, so he knew where she lodged—up a lot of stairs till you came right under the roof.

The room was small, and only lighted by a skylight—and yet not a skylight exactly; once it had been a dark kind of closet, then they took off a few tiles, and put in some panes of glass, and called it a room. It certainly was not a cheerful dwelling-place, and yet, perhaps, the sky overhead, with its over-casting clouds and rare bits of blue by day, and sometimes by night its stars and fog-veiled moon, were better company than gazing for ever on endless old roofs, or looking down into squalid back yards and out-houses.

Bab's mother was sitting in front of a small rickety table, on it one guttering tallow candle. How she wished it would not gutter—it was such a waste! It couldn't be helped; there was such a draught coming down from the skylight, there was no mending that. She sat stitching strips of fur into caps, bravely working to keep herself and child from actual starvation. With wearied eyes and aching head, and a heart that was very sore, she worked on, far into the night sometimes. She did not dare give in. The money, little as it would be when the job was done, must be earned, for that little meant a good deal to her—it was her *all*!

In a corner, lying down in her clothes, just as she came

home, like a heap of rags, was Bab, sound asleep, with her empty wink-basket thrown down by her side.

"Yes, that's my poor Bab;" the woman saw Peter curiously scanning the dark corner. "It's my poor Bab. She ought to be helpin' me with my stitching, but she came back that dead tired, I wouldn't wake her, poor child, for all the pence I ever earned. She's had a long and weary day of it. She couldn't sell her winks; she wouldn't come back till she had. 'Tisn't often she's so dead beat; she's got *spirit* enough for two or three, but she haven't got strength equal to it. The morsel of food she gets ain't a sparrow's meal, a dog's stomach would turn at it most times; but we must be thankful for what we've got."

Peter's story about the old umbrella, and Dandie and his blind master, didn't take long to tell.

"I'll take care of your umbrella, my dear; you're welcome to leave it wherever you fancies, and nobody will touch it. And if you've a mind to come and do your work in such a dull, dark place, you shall mend it here. P'raps I could stitch up the big holes in the cotton covering when you've done away with the skewing of the bones and made it to open."

"When I've found Dandie," said Peter, quite determined not to touch it till then.

"If I was you I'd look for him further afield. You may be sure whoever's stolen him wouldn't let the dog bide anywhere near his old master's lodging. Poor dog! I shouldn't a bit wonder if he has broke his heart by this time. It must be cruel, good-for-nothing wretches who

stole the poor blind man's dog. But there, the sort that would do it are bad all through."

The poor woman's busy needle was plying all the while, stitch, stitch, stitch, till the strips of fur had grown almost into a cap ; and Bab still slept on in the corner, all unconscious of Peter and his umbrella. When she awoke early in the morning a faint glimmer of daylight came streaming through the glass in the ceiling and fell on it in the corner. She wondered how it came there !

CHAPTER IV

THE TRACK OF THE STRAYED



FORTNIGHT came and passed away. Peter's untiring search for poor Dandie was still fruitless.

It was like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, and worse, said the old blind man ; but Peter persevered, and would not give in. Every day he walked on and on—anywhere, it did not much matter where, it seemed to him, so long as he kept going on, spying in and about the most unlikely places. He was told *unlikely* places were always the most likely. At last his heart sank, and he felt full of trouble ; hope deferred does make the heart sick. He was very weary, and his legs ached all day and all night long ; and somehow he always felt hungry, and no wonder, for he could not earn any coppers, and the old blind man was only able to spare him just enough to keep life going. And yet Peter was not utterly hopeless ; it is difficult to kill hope in young hearts. He saw plainly—he could not hide it from himself—that the poor old man was not the least like what he used to be ; he seemed to be fast dwindling away, he felt quite sure of it.

One day he said to Peter,—

“ Old bones hang long on their hinges ; but my time’s most come, I knows it is. I can’t keep life in me, I’m sure I can’t—not that I value it now *she’s* gone ; so ‘tis best to let Dandie bide.”

Peter was a little hero. He was not old enough to be helped by the consciousness of doing an unselfish thing, nevertheless the glow of self-forgetting love was, all unknown to him, helping him over the every-day hard places of his sunless life.

* * * * *

By this time, and perhaps it was no wonder, a feeling of distrust was creeping into the heart of the honest Mrs. Cobb, the baker’s widow, about Peter and her old umbrella. Little wonder, therefore, that her misgiving should shape itself into words and find utterance.

She was in the shop, sitting behind the counter ; Liza-Loo, as her mother called her—she was christened Eliza Louisa—was standing at the door of her small back room. “ Liza-Loo ! ” burst out Mrs. Cobb, “ that boy’s a rascal after all. Here’s ten days ”—she counted ten on her fingers—“ here’s ten days—and more—it’s a fortnight and over, since he took that umbrella, and he’ve never brought it back nor been nigh’st the place. I’ve been so drove with one thing and another I’ve never thought of it till this very minute, and whatever put it into my head now I can’t say, unless it was the sight of that stale bun.”

“ Take my word for it, mother, you never will see anything more of your umbrella or the boy either,” remarked Liza-Loo, throwing up the tip of her nose in triumph, and

pulling down her jacket into shape. She could not endure having wrinkles round her waist. Wrinkles did not accord with her ideas of a good fit.

“Don’t be so pert, Liza-Loo, and let your jacket bide. It’s no wonder your jackets and bodies are always on the wear, for you’re always a-pullin’ at ‘em and a-strainin’ ‘em as tight as tight can be. I can’t see no honour, nor glory neither, in bein’ pinched in like a wasp till ‘tis a wonder you can fetch a honest breath. If ‘twas for our good God A’mighty would have made us all like wasps, that’s my belief.”

“*My* belief is, mother, that you should have asked more about that boy before you trusted him with your old umbrella.”

“It ain’t my way, Liza-Loo, to waste good breath. Askin’ the boy questions wasn’t none of my business anyhow. I don’t believe he’d tell a lie no more than your own mother would.”

“At all events,” persisted Liza-Loo, “he’ve got your umbrella, or somebody has, for I’ll warrant he’ve pawned it.”

“‘What’s worth doin’ at all is worth takin’ time over,’ that’s my motto, Liza-Loo. He’s a-makin’ a good job of it, see if he isn’t. I never did believe in hurryin’; slow and easy goes far in a day, as I often tell you when you’re a-hurryin’ and a-scurryin’ over your cleanin’-up. Not but what the boy had better have dropped in to say the umbrella was all right, instead of leavin’ his character open to suspicion.”

Liza-Loo laughed a short laugh at the idea of his having any character at stake, then she said,—

'Those old-world sayin's are all very well for you mother, and the like of you, but we young girls don't believe in 'em in these go-ahead days. I'm certain our teacher don't either, for he gave out last Sunday that he was goin' to lecture to us on 'advanced ideas' and 'modern thought.' Those were his very words."

"And a deal the wiser and the better you'll all be for his pains, Liza-Loo. Advanced ideas, indeed ! I call it advanced rubbish. All these new-fangled schemes is clear runnin' against Providence and the Bible. It's a awful and a wicked thing for folks to try to do away with the blessed old Bible, and that's what they're aimin' at with their advanced ideas. Haven't I been teachin' you all your life, Liza-Loo, that the Bible is God's own Word from the very first syllable down to the very last and back again ? The teacher had better by half tell ye to ask for the good old paths, and where is the good way, and learn ye how to walk in 'em. Them's Scripture words, Liza-Loo, and the teacher couldn't find half such fine ones in his own head if he was to try ever so hard, and I'd tell him so to his face if he came here, I would."

"Our teacher tells us we're pillars of progress," said Liza-Loo, pulling herself up, "and that progress is the law of our being. He wants to make us *think*."

"*You* don't *look* much like a pillar, Liza-Loo. All I know is, thinking won't make bread, and that's your livin' They're tryin' to think and talk away our very souls, that's what they're doin'. It's the end of all their thinkin', it is, and they'll leave us then no better off than the beasts of the field. When I was a girl folks were content to have

things as God A'mighty made 'em, and now they must needs be always a-meddlin', and a-messin', and a thinkin' that they could have built the world and made us a deal better than He did. To 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' is the best progress that we poor working folks can make——"

Just at this moment a customer, coming in for a loaf of to-day's baking, put an end to the discussion, and Liza-Loo disappeared behind the little glass door into the dusky shade of the back parlour.

* * * * *

It was lamplight. The stars were just beginning to tremble in the small patch of sky overhead. In the narrow thoroughfare itself were stands of refuse fruit and vegetables and dingy, unsavoury smelling shops. The street had never known better days. There was no air about it of bygone respectability, as one can say of some places. The evening was warm, untidy women were hanging half out of their windows, gossiping or watching for their children to return from the miserable errand—fetching beer or spirits from the public-house not far off. Its red blinds sent a stream of flaring colour across the grimy pavement. Standing in the fierce light of the gas at the open doorway were two men, lounging and talking to each other. One was inside, the other had one foot firmly planted on the pavement, while his other foot rested on the doorstep.

Both men were rough and ill-favoured, shabbily dressed in threadbare coats and blackened fustians, with loose

plaid scarves round their necks, the top button of their coats fastened, to hide the total absence of shirt and waist-coat.

The man who stood inside had unquestionably a "bad record" at the police court. Sitting by his side on the sanded floor was a miserable-looking dog, shivering with hunger and very wretchedness. He had a leather strap round his neck, to which was fastened a heavy chain, which the man held in his hand, so it was useless for it to try to run away. Evidently there was no bond of sympathy between the man and his dog. The older man outside had a large, coarse canvas sack thrown over his left shoulder, ready for any emergency, and a handy receptacle for anything he might pick up. "What we finds we keeps" was his rule; and yet there was about him something which seemed to indicate that he had grown weary of the hard and risky life he was leading, but there was no escape for him now: he must go on as he had begun to the bitter end, and reap as he had sown—a harvest of woes. Neither of the men noticed that Peter was leaning against a wall within earshot. Barefooted boys were no rarity in those parts; there were always plenty of them hanging about, in or out of the gutters or round the open, yawning entrances of public-houses. Besides, with the usual clamour of voices inside, it seemed scarcely possible that anybody could hear what they were talking about. What was stranger, the men had not noticed that there was a policeman on the opposite side of the street. He walked slowly, with a heavy, measured step, as if perfectly unconcerned with all that was going on around him. They little

guessed he was making mental notes, and that, like an experienced old mouser, he was ready to spring on a victim at any moment. Perhaps both men were conscious, for a wonder, that they were not wanted for anything out of the common. Be this as it may, they both seemed to be pretty much at their ease, and were evidently bargaining about something or other. Somehow, Peter's curiosity was roused, and his suspicions too. Dandie was always uppermost in his thoughts. He fancied it might be something to do with him, so he crept a little nearer. There, amidst the din, he could just catch a sentence or so.

"He mayn't be nothink to look at, but he's good alround," said the man holding the dog, "and so was his mother afore him."

"And much you knowed of her, I should guess," interrupted the other man, with a knowing wink and a hoarse laugh.

"What's that to you or anybody else? I haven't got no further use for the dog, that's why I'm partin' with 'im."

"He won't be no particklar *use* to me as I knows of, but he looks up at ye so piteous like in the face I wouldn't mind takin' him off your hands for standin' treat for a pot of beer."

"Law bless ye! You don't think I'd let 'im go for that? A pot of beer that ye chucks down your throat, and it's gone afore you can cry quits with it! Not I. Me that's had 'im ever since he were a pup!"

"I don't sort of believe that you and that ere dog are such old friends as all that. I guess you haven't been his

master so very long; he don't look as if he was what ye may call 'appy in his situvation, he don't; he looks down in the mouth, down in his luck. I shouldn't be surprised if you picked 'im up when his master wasn't near him nor nowhere handy. There ain't no harm in pickin' up things; pickin' up ain't stealin'."

"Well, if you're so particular taken with the dog, two bobs 'll buy 'im.

"Two bobs! I should look a long time at two bobs afore I laid 'em down for a dog. I'd say one bob and half another."

"All right, he's yourn."

Before Peter could get near enough to have the chance of seeing if the dog really was Dandie, it was pitched, head foremost, into the large empty sack, and then the man swung it, dog and all, over his shoulder again. He was evidently used to the kind of thing. The money was paid down before the dog changed masters. In another minute the man hurried off along the dimly lighted street; after a while he disappeared and went into a narrow alley.

The policeman, standing a little way off on the opposite side of the street, had been watching the men, and had taken note of the whole proceeding. He had heard of the loss of the blind man's dog, so his suspicions were naturally aroused by all he had seen and guessed as to the contents of the sack. It was quite evident that it contained something heavy, for as he walked the man bent forward under the weight of the sack which was swinging over his shoulder. The policeman kept his eye on him, following

him at a short distance. He was very careful not to let the man suspect he was tracking him. Peter crossed the street and walked close behind the bobby. To do this was quite a new experience for Peter. He was too much afraid of a policeman to do anything but try to dodge him and get out of his way. Presently he pushed in close to the man's side and looked up steadily in his face. Peter's heart beat very hard against his jacket. The policeman noticed the boy's eager, inquiring eye, and could not understand it. With a gasp for breath, still staring into the man's cold, steel grey eyes, Peter said,—

“That's Dandie he've got in the sack.”

“And who's Dandie, boy? and what do you know about it?”

The story of Dandie and his master was soon told.

The policeman walked on at a brisker pace now. Peter had hard work with his bare feet to keep up with the heavy, even tread of the well-shod, big man by his side, but he pattered along, thinking nothing of himself, but a great deal of Dandie.

“This here is the passage they went down,” exclaimed Peter; he meant the man and Dandie.

“All right,” answered the bobby; “but we mustn't be too anxious, or appear as if we had any business in particular down there. We've got him safe enough; but if he knew we were wanting him he'd hide away somewhere, or climb over a wall, or be scaling the roofs before we could catch him.”

“Dan's a-whinin' and a-barkin', I knows he's there—I can hear him,” said Peter, stopping to listen,

"Don't make too sure about that, my boy, but it do seem to me you've got some sharpish ears."

"I knows this here alley well," said Peter; "there's a big yard at the bottom with all sorts of things in it; I guess it belongs to the folks as lives down here."

"All right, now's our time! Follow me—close at my heels. You'll know the dog if you see him?"

"Oh, rather! I'd know him with my eyes shut, and he'd know me if 'twas ever so dark."

Down the alley went the bobby and Peter at a quick pace now; men were lounging at their doors in their shirt sleeves, smoking pipes. At the sight of a policeman, and at the sound of his regular step, heads peered out everywhere. They all wondered what the poor boy had been doing, and what the bobby was going to do with him. The boy did not belong to their alley; they were all positive of that. They could not satisfy their curiosity, for very soon the bobby and Peter both disappeared through the high gates into the yard. They were only just in time, for as the policeman put his hand on the latch to open the door, the man was in the very act of bolting it inside.

"I want your dog, if you please, and I wants you too," said the policeman.

"Do ye? Then you can't have neither of us. He's my dog, and I bought him honest, I did."

"Dare say you mid have done it. Nevertheless, we want him. When folks buys dogs honest like, I don't believe 'tis usual to fling 'em into a big sack and carry 'em off as secret like as if they'd a dead corpse as they was ashamed of."

The man was silent: he saw it was all up with him; he raised his cap, scratched his head, and considered.

“There’s no use spending any more time parleying. I know the dog’s here, and he is the dog that somebody stole from the blind man.”

“Well, if you won’t be hard with me I’ll show ye where he is; I bought him honest, ’pon my soul I did, for a bob and sixpence, and the dog’s worth it, every ha’penny.”

The man led the way into a shed, and there, shut up in a narrow rabbit-hutch, was Dandie!

Peter could have cried for joy when he saw the dog poking his black nose through the bars and wagging his tail, as he had never done since he was stolen.

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CHAPTER V

THE POLICE COURT



T was too late that evening for Peter to go and tell the poor old blind man the good news about Dandie. He would have left his old place at the corner of the street and have gone to some lodging-house for a night's rest, where, Peter did not know and could not guess, for since the loss of Dandie he felt so helpless, he turned into the nearest place he could meet with.

Without his dog to guide him, and only his stick to depend on, it was hard work and really dangerous to be groping about all alone. He had lost heart, and felt so desolate now Dandie was gone, he did not seem to care what became of him. He was almost weary of his darkened life. He missed and craved for the lost love of her who was gone. The affection, faithful and true, which Dandie showed his master had in some measure made up for it.

Early the next morning, before the business of the day for most people had begun, and long before the blind man had even started from his night's shelter, Peter was on

the look-out, waiting for him. "Dan's found!" had been hanging on his lips ever since he saw him in the rabbit-hutch. All the night he must have been talking in his sleep about him, for when he rubbed his eyes open the next morning he was still repeating, "Dan's found!" Peter had no coppers, and could not find any more convenient place for sleeping in, so he crept into a large iron roller; he remembered seeing one just at the entrance of a yard. He climbed over the wooden fence easily, and without anybody noticing him he went quietly along and soon found the roller and got inside all right. "'Twas a deal better," he thought, "than being squeezed in among a lot of casuals." He dreamed he saw Dandie bound round and round with iron hoops, and almost crushed to death! No wonder he dreamed such a horrible dream when he was himself cramped up, nose and knees together, inside an iron roller! No wonder "Dandie's found!" were the first words he uttered when he awoke.

When he dragged himself out of the roller, and tried to shake himself, he felt very like Dandie in his dream, as if he were bound round and squeezed out of shape. After a good shake and a stretch the use of his arms and legs came back; he jumped down from the top of the palings and had a fast run down the street, and then he felt all right again, and ready to do anything that came in his way.

Peter had to watch and wait for some time before the blind man appeared. He grew very impatient; it seemed to him as if the time would never pass, and yet he had only heard the clock, not far off, strike once; watching

and waiting was wearisome work for a boy who had never known what it meant, had never learned patience. Peter fancied something must have happened to the poor old man; perhaps he was dead, and would never know Dandie was found, never have his dog again. Of course he could not see him; he could feel him, which to him was almost the same; the touch of the blind is so sensitive, so acute, their fingers are almost like eyes to them. It was not unlikely he was dead, thought Peter, for uncle had told him he should die and not want Dandie any more. He wouldn't have said so unless he meant it. And then, with the crude, misshapen marvellings of his boyhood, he fell to wondering if everybody knew when they were going to die. His father didn't guess he was going off so quick, he was sure of that, for he had often talked to Peter about what they should do when he grew up to be a man, and could earn money to help his father. That was all over now, and poor Peter's little future looked very lonely and sorrowful.

Peter's strange fancyings helped to pass away the lagging time.

At last the old man came in sight walking slowly, keeping his stick well to the edge of the pavement, that he might be quite sure he was not on the road.

Off rushed Peter, breathless, but still repeating, "Dandie's found!" "Dandie's found!"

The old man caught the words, and knew Peter's voice, but he could not believe his ears.

"This isn't one of your old pranks, Peter, is it?" asked the old man, seizing the boy by the arm; "but I don't

believe you'd be so cruel as to deceive me. Dandie would have jumped up on me if you'd got him. Boys are so heartless, they don't mind what they do or say, but that isn't like you, Peter—you've got a heart, I'm sure you have, only you've got nobody belonging to you, nobody to play upon it—nobody but me, a poor old man. The heart, to my way of thinking, is most like a fiddle: it ain't no good, it don't give out no sound, unless it's *touched* and *played upon*—then it sort of sympathises and talks to you. I loved my fiddle, and I likes to think it knewed it. Folks used to say they couldn't get the sound out of it that I did."

"I haven't got Dandie, uncle, but I knows where he is. Me and the bobby have seed him. He's squeezed into a rabbit-hutch, and can't turn hisself round; I don't expect he can. He'd have licked me, only he couldn't get his nose fur enough out. He wagged his tail. The man said he bought him honest like of another chap. Dandie looked as miserable as if he'd been drowned, and thrown away on a ash-heap. I'd have brought 'im along wi' me, only I couldn't have him, 'cause Dandie's got to 'pear in court, and so will you and I, uncle. The bobby guesses that t'other chap stole and bagged 'im. I didn't dare say nothin', 'cause the bobby told me afore we got there I was to be sure to keep my tongue 'twixt my teeth; but seein' Dandie like a *convict* in jail was enough to make ye blubber, 'twas."

"No doubt it's part of the dog's nature to go a-chasin' cats. Dandie couldn't get on without exercise; but the habit has caused me at times a deal of worry and uneasi-

ness. I was always afraid something would happen to Dandie one day, and that he'd never come back again."

The poor man could say no more, but in his heart he was very thankful. He brushed the back of his hand across his sightless eyes, wet with tears, and then settled down on his camp stool to endure another day of weariness.

Dandie was so much to him ; he was only a dog, but dogs were created to be our faithful companions. To his poor blind master he had been that and much more.

Dandie loved praise and approbation, and he got both from many a passer-by, a pat on his head, and a kindly-spoken "Well done, good dog !" made his bright eyes sparkle with a glow of self-satisfaction, and set his tail wagging. The wag of a dog's tail means a great deal more than any one suspects. It asks and inquires, and tells of the gratitude which he feels as much as when he jumps up to lick the hand he loves. Dan could read nothing in his master's eyes, but the dog knew full well all that his kind words meant—all the love there was in the tender touch of the blind man's hand.

Poor Dandie's experience since the day he was stolen was very bitter. Not a single kind word, only kicks and cuffs, hunger and thirst, with little or nothing to satisfy either ; and then to lose his liberty, and to be shut up in a narrow rabbit-hutch, that was the height of misery ! A poor, half-starved cat prowled about now and again, or sat mewing on the top of his hutch, but he had not either the will or the power to chase it.

Dogs need real sympathy, and look for it as much as

we do, and we ought to give it to them, for they feel keenly the cruelty and heartless neglect too often their lot, and their bodies are as sensible of pain as ours.

* * * * *

The next morning proved to the poor blind man the truth and reality of all Peter had told him as to finding Dandie, and about their having to appear at the police court to identify and claim him, if, indeed, the dog turned out to be his property.

Going before a magistrate was quite a novel experience for both of them. Peter did not like it at all; he had a kind of vague suspicion that he should be locked up, or something of the kind, for telling the policeman all he overheard of the men's conversation at the door of the public-house. Nothing the blind man could say either pacified or satisfied him. He looked as frightened and trembled as much as if he were verily guilty of a crime. Bab was out, as usual, selling winkles and crying, "Winks! winks O!" She happened to be close to the police court just as he and the blind man, side by side with the policeman, were entering. She could not think what was up. She noticed Peter's frightened look, but she was not near enough to speak to him; he had no thought of Bab, no eyes for her; his eyes were fixed on the policeman, or looked straight forward into the court, which seemed to him a dark abyss from which there was no escape. Bab had not seen Peter for some time, not since the evening he left the old umbrella in the corner of her mother's room when she was fast asleep on the floor and knew nothing

about it. The umbrella still stood there just as he left it, so he could not be had up for stealing or pawning it, she was certain of that. Her mother had never thought of telling her about Dandie, so she could not guess Peter was had up on the dog's account.

The only way of finding out what had happened was to go into court and hear what went on; so Bab elbowed herself through the crowd, winks and all, and got up into the gallery, where she would be able to see and hear everything.

Bab, with her unruly head of dark hair, was quite a prominent feature in the front row of the gallery. Her large eyes were very soon busy sweeping the space below in search of Peter. It was not long before she discovered him, standing by the side of the blind man, who was leaning with both his hands on his stout stick. Peter wore his large, gaping leather boots. Bab did not see them. He thought they would lend an air of respectability, at all events, to his outward appearance; besides, he had an idea that bare feet would not be paying proper respect to the magistrate on the bench.

Peter had *pulled* his hair pretty straight; it took him some time to effect this; and shaken and rubbed the long-standing dust and dirt off the piece of cloth which answered the purpose of a small cap on the crown of his head. His jacket was buttoned up to his chin—at least, where there happened to be a button. Just a few were left to tell the tale of better days long ago! He had looked at himself reflected in the glass window of a shop, and was perfectly satisfied with his turn-out.

As he stood motionless on the floor of the court, his face still bore an expression of fear. He fancied everybody stared at him as if he were the culprit.

Bab kept on nodding to him. She thought he would be glad to see her and know she was there; but all her attentions were lost on him, for he saw nobody but the magistrate—a broad-shouldered, stout man, with a large head, with a quantity of iron-grey hair and overhanging eyebrows to match. He looked you through and through, and seemed to be reading all that was inside of a person; and no doubt he could, for he had sat on the bench for many years, and had gained a thorough insight into the character of the class of persons brought before him.

Peter could not take his eyes off him. He did not move hand or foot; he seemed fascinated, just as a poor, harmless rabbit is fascinated, and cannot escape from the boa-constrictor who is going to swallow him. Peter looked as if he were afraid the magistrate with a large head and wide mouth meant to swallow him whole.

There was one consolation for Bab: she soon discovered that, at all events, Peter was not the prisoner at the bar; still, she was sorely put out and puzzled to understand why he was there at all.

Presently the two men were brought into court and placed at the bar.

Turner was charged with stealing the dog, and Groves with buying it for eighteenpence, knowing it to be stolen property. Both men were described as having no regular occupation, and of no fixed residence. The moment they

caught sight of the blind man they knew it was a bad job and all over with them.

They very soon recognised Peter as the barefooted boy hanging about the public-house; but then they never for a moment guessed or even suspected that he was on the watch, or was listening to them, or taking any interest in the fate of the dog.

Both men cast a withering glance at him, and looked as if they could do for the boy then and there, for they felt certain he was the cause of their being had up. He must have betrayed them to the police.

Poor Peter looked at them, and felt like a dog under the lash, ducking his rough head to avert the expected blow.

The evidence of police constable Green showed that he was on his beat walking along French Street on the evening in question, between eight and nine o'clock. He saw the two prisoners standing at the open door of the public-house. His notice was especially attracted, as he knew something—he might say a great deal—of their antecedents. He loitered a bit on the opposite side of the street, as he thought there was no harm in just watching what they were after. He did not think they observed him. French Street was always badly lighted, and just where he was walking it would have been difficult to distinguish him, especially as the men themselves were standing in the full and blinding glare of the gas lights inside the public-house. The dog was sitting on the floor in front of the bar. He had a collar with a big chain attached to it. Turner had the chain in his right hand.

Of course he couldn't hear what passed between them, but it was evident they were talking about the dog, as Turner pointed to him, and Groves bent forward to pat him. It didn't appear to him that Turner was the dog's real master, for the animal seemed to sort of shrink from his touch. Soon after he saw Groves chuck some money into Turner's hand. The next minute Groves pulled an empty sack off his shoulder, opened it, and, with Turner's help, pitched the dog, head foremost, into the sack. There was a broad grin on Turner's face, as if he wasn't sorry to be rid of rather a risky bit of goods. Groves flung the sack across his shoulder and hurried away, while Turner stood at the door watching him for a moment, and then walked away in a contrary direction.

The police constable further stated that whilst he was following Groves to find out where he was going to take the dog, the boy Peter Troupe, pointing to Peter, crossed the street and came alongside of him ('twasn't often boys were so willing to be friendly with a policeman). Before he could ask the young chap what he wanted with him, he looked up in his face in a sort of honest, knowing way, and said, "He've got Dandie in that 'ere sack, I'm most sure he have." This only confirmed his own opinion that it was the dog that was "wanted," for he had heard of the theft, and was on the look-out for him. The policeman stated that he followed Groves, telling Peter to keep close to his side and say nothing. After going some distance, Groves turned down Beech Alley. He was sure he'd got him and the dog nice and safe, as it was a blind alley, and did not lead nowhere. So he waited a bit to

give the man time to get the dog out of the sack. When he thought 'twould just about do, he and the boy walked at a pretty brisk pace down the alley till they came to a yard. This seemed a handy place for stowing away a dog that was likely to be inquired for. He opened the gate just as the man was fastening it inside. He told him what his business was, and after a little parleying, he showed him the dog shut up in a rabbit-hutch.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIDE OF HONESTY



"Is the dog in court?" asked the magistrate.
"If not, bring him in."

A peal of laughter, mixed with cheers, rang through the court when Dandie appeared. Even Peter joined in the laugh, and Bab too: she was clapping her hands as fast and loud as she could.

The policeman led Dandie into court with a heavy chain. The poor dog hung his head and looked very deplorable and half-starved. The moment he caught sight of the old blind man he barked for joy, and jumped upon him. He evidently shrank away from the two prisoners at the bar. It was easy to see that the blind man was his master.

"He's Dandie, and he's my dog, there's no mistake about that," he said; "I guess he was off chasing a cat; 'twas sort of part of his nature to do it, but I don't believe but what he'd have come back all right and safe enough if he hadn't been interfered with. I've had him ever since he was a pup, and I wouldn't take a hundred pounds for him. He's more than a dog to me—he's a

real friend, and the only friend I've got, after counting Peter."

All the time he was speaking he stood with his hand on Dandie's head, and Dandie seemed to love to have it so. It was an unusual scene in court, and there were but few who were not touched by the sight.

The magistrate then asked Turner if he had anything to say for himself.

"All I've got to say is, I didn't steal the dog ; I picked him up. One evenin' when I was out and about I seed him a-strayin' along the streets wi'out any 'ome, seemingly with nobody handy to claim him. I thought I mid as well have him as not, so I just caught him up and carried him away wi' me. I'd have given him up honest if I'd seen any bills out about him, but there wasn't none, so I guessed his master didn't want him back. He wasn't a bad-lookin' dog ; but as I'd no use in partick'lar for him, I sold him to that man," nodding his head in the direction of Groves.

"And I'm very sorry I ever seed Turner or the dog either, that I am. I'm that sorry I've got into the scrape. I bought the dog honest. The truth is, I offered the man a pot of beer for him ; he wouldn't take that, and then I puts down eighteenpence, and, says he, 'The dog's yours.' He looked half-starved. I could see he was a good sort ; and as I have always had a fancy for dogs, I thought I should like to see what I could do wi' him. I haven't spoke nothing but the truth, so I hopes you'll deal lenient with me."

Turner's record on the charge-sheets of the police courts

was a very bad one, so the magistrate sentenced him to six months' imprisonment and hard labour.

The old man Groves, of whom the police spoke favourably, was fined ten shillings.

Peter and the blind man and Dandie were just leaving the court when the police constable stepped forward and asked the magistrate's permission to say a few words in favour of Peter.

"Certainly; what do you know of him?"

"Well, your honour, I don't believe he's ever been charged in either of the courts, which isn't what I could say of many of them ragged, bare-footed boys."

Peter looked down at his boots. At all events, that day he wasn't bare-footed.

He added,—

"It do seem a pity the boy couldn't be helped to lead a more respectable life than that of a gutter-grubber, which will most probably end in his thieving or doin' something worse."

"You're quite right, Green. It is a pity not to try to keep him from evil. We might find some industrial home, or a home of some sort where he might be taken care of. What do you say to that, my boy?" asked the magistrate, addressing Peter.

"Please, sir, I ain't in no want of a 'ome."

"How's that, my boy? I understood from the constable you were homeless, and just living by your wits."

"When father was alive," said Peter, "he and me had a reg'lar 'ome down one pair of stairs, but now my 'ome's anywhere. I likes that best, 'cause then I follows my

trade. I ain't 'zactly what he called me"—he nodded in the direction of the police constable—"I ain't 'zactly a gutter-grubber. Father mended umbrellas, and when he died he left me his business, and I've took to it. I've got a 'brella now waiting to be set right, only I've been so busy lookin' for Dandie I haven't had no time to see to it."

A laugh, in which Peter did *not* join: he could not see anything to laugh at.

"Well, my boy, if you don't care to be placed in any home, which would undoubtedly be the best and safest place, perhaps you wouldn't object to receive five shillings out of the poor-box? I think you thoroughly deserve it, from all the police constable says of you and you have told us yourself. The money will help you on in your trade, I haven't a doubt."

Five silver shillings! Peter did not believe his ears. He who had never in all his life handled more than a few coppers at a time, was he really going to have five shillings given him to do what he liked with? He seemed to be dreaming, a dim, formless dream, too good to be true, and from which he must awake to find his ragged pockets empty as ever!

Peter was silent; he did not know what to say. His eyes shone with pleasure as he stood hitching up his trousers emphatically, evidently hoping it would help him to express all he ought to say. Every eye was fixed upon him, everybody was watching him. The police constable nudged him with his elbow, and said,—

"You haven't said thank'ee to his honour."

The magistrate was not the least angry with Peter, he was immensely amused. Handing the money to Peter, he said,—

“Mind you don’t waste it, boy. I mean, don’t go spending it all on toffy and rubbish. I should advise you to buy a good stout pair of boots, or——”

“I thanks you a lot, sir, if you please,” interrupted Peter. “I ain’t agoin’ to spend them bobs on nothin’ for myself. Uncle wants his fiddle dreadful bad, he do, ‘cause he’s so lonely like; but he can’t get it out of pawn, he haven’t the money. I guess these here five bobs, though, would do it!”

“And who’s this uncle?” asked the magistrate, turning to the police constable. “I thought you told me the boy was friendless.”

“Uncle’s the blind man,” answered Peter quickly; “he ain’t no *real* relation, but he lets me call ‘im uncle ‘cause he and me, we two, gets on as nice and chum-like as if we was twins. ‘Tis *his* fiddle that’s in pawn, and I al’ays told him if ever I got on wi’ my umbrella trade I’d get it out for him. Uncle gave me the ticket, ‘cause, he said, ‘twasn’t nothin’ but waste paper, for he’d never be able to get anything like the money he’d pawned it for; so I knows where to go for it.”

Peter pulled a small, dirty bit of paper out of his pocket, which proved to the magistrate he was speaking the truth. It was a pawnbroker’s ticket for a fiddle left in pledge by John Figis.

The blind man knew nothing of the piece of good luck which had befallen Peter, and nothing about his fiddle, as

he left the court directly he was no longer wanted. A policeman took him safely out. He thought Peter was following him and Dandie, and wondered what had become of the boy. Bab was there too, waiting outside for Peter; she had pushed her way out of the gallery when she supposed the case was disposed of, as the prisoners had left the dock, so she did not know Peter was left behind. She was lingering about to see him and ask him when he was coming for his old umbrella. Not seeing him, however, she told the old blind man she would see him safe out of the crowd and take him to the corner of the street, his usual place. She would look out for Peter; no doubt he would soon overtake them.

The old blind man held Dandie by a bit of rope, not that there was any need for it as far as the dog was concerned, for he had no strength or pluck left to run after the most aggravating cat, and not the faintest wish to leave his master. Dandie seemed to be quite stupefied; he could hardly drag one leg before the other, they absolutely shook under the weight of his skin-and-bone body. Every now and then he turned up his dull, dim eyes to his master's face, to be quite sure it was all right and to express his thankfulness—that was the utmost he could do. If he could have lain down and died then and there he would gladly have done it, but he didn't, his master had still need of him.

Peter did not overtake them. Bab fancied he must somehow have missed them in the crowd outside the court.

Peter saw the prison van drive off. Turner was in it.

A set scowl was on his ill-favoured face. In his cold, savage eyes there was an expression of a threat without words, as he fixed them on the boy, which meant to tell him he had made up his mind that he should live to regret once for all that he had peached. The man, for himself, fervently wished he had never set eyes or hands on the dog.

This was entirely lost on Peter. He never gave heed to Turner, scarcely noticed he was in the van. The boy was full of his own good luck and the thought of taking the fiddle out of pledge. He was not sorry that neither Bab nor the blind man with Dandie were anywhere to be seen when he came out of court. He wanted it all to come—especially the fiddle—as a great surprise to them. His pockets were not trustworthy, so he held the money in his hand—five shillings, screwed up in a bit of paper which he picked up for the purpose. How heavy it felt! How intoxicating it all was—Dandie, the court, the police constable, the large-headed, stout magistrate, his kind words,—Peter never in his wildest moments had ever dreamt that a magistrate could be kind; Peter had only viewed him as a “terror,” not as a man at all! Above everything intoxicating were those five silver coins! For the life of him he couldn’t help every now and then unscrewing the bit of paper to be quite sure he hadn’t made a mistake, and that in the end they would turn out to be only coppers!

He had gone into court trembling and shivering with fright; he came out—well, he wasn’t quite sure if he was walking on his head or his heels! That didn’t in

the least signify; what he wanted to do was to hurry off at full speed to the pawnshop, put the money down like a man, and carry off the fiddle!

There was no need now to maintain his respectability by wearing his old boots, so he kicked them off, and was once more a barefooted boy. His first thought was to leave them in the gutter, a legacy to some less lucky gutter-boy; but second thoughts were best—they usually are—there might not be much money left after he had redeemed the fiddle; besides, they were his father's boots, so he hitched them together and flung one behind over his shoulder, the other hung down in front. Having no fixed abode, Peter had to carry his wardrobe about with him every day in this fashion.

It was some time before Peter reached the pawnshop. In his excitement he overlooked the short cuts, he did not quite remember which way to go, although the blind man had often told him when he was talking about the place where he had pledged his fiddle. It had not stuck to the boy's memory, for he never guessed anything would lead his steps thitherwards.

Three gilt balls, the pawnbroker's sign, were over the shop door, the only bright thing about the place, which was in every respect small and shabby looking. That the owner was a Jew was clearly shown by his name, "Isaac Cohen," painted in dingy colours on a board over the low window. The small panes of glass were grimy; Isaac Cohen never troubled himself to clean them outside, and his wife was not inclined to waste her time moving everything in it and cleaning them inside, which was her

special province. She considered a sort of mysterious gloom was quite the thing for their business, which she always described as being decidedly "piteous like," for nobody would want to have dealings with them and come there unless they was, so to speak, under a cloud of some sort.

The entrance to the shop was almost choked with every description of wearing apparel, and blankets, rugs, bits of carpet, pillows and bolsters, and so on. The floor was fairly blocked with iron fenders and fire-irons, and an endless variety of goods and chattels, all left in pledge at one time or another.

The smaller articles were stowed away in the window: odds and ends of every kind, bits of broken glass and china, sham gold ear-rings and other ornaments to any amount—life's luxuries which could most easily be done without—old coral necklaces with eardrops to match, relics of bygone gentility. Common accordions, with very little breath in their ill-used, over-taxed bellows; a flute and a flageolet; old silver watches that had stopped at the last hour of *that* day—the day when all hope had died out of the owner's heart, and he was obliged to pledge it to help to appease some aching, hungry pang. Old boots gaping with over-much wear, boots and shoes that had toiled along a wearisome path of unrest that never led to a haven of repose were there; and one tiny pair of shoes, "baby's first shoes," that had never trodden an earthly path, dainty little shoes that looked as if they had a sad history all their own—and so they had. Mercifully, the little wearer was gone far above the golden balls, far

beyond the sights and sounds of this troublesome world, up into the ever-deepening blue over head. Perhaps—who can say, who would gainsay it?—gone to be a ministering spirit, with comfort in its wings, to cheer and help, though invisible to mortal eye, its poor, lonely mother, still struggling with her cruel fate—a brutalized, drunken husband, who drank away the money for which he pledged those little shoes! No one knew the poor woman's history, nobody noticed her as she looked through her tears and through the grimy glass windows at "baby's first shoes," and she still too penniless to redeem the treasure!

Peter cared for none of the various articles. He did not notice one of them. His quick eyes were searching for the fiddle everywhere, and peeping into the dark corners at the sides of the windows; but he could discover no fiddle!

He stood outside the shop for some time before he ventured to go in. Nobody interfered with him. It was a common, every-day occurrence to see ragged, barefooted boys and girls hanging about the place.

Presently Mrs. Cohen came to the door to amuse and air herself; the atmosphere of the shop was so thick and close she was obliged now and again to breathe something fresher and purer. Her general appearance was certainly frowsy. Like her husband, she was of the Jewish persuasion. Her countenance betrayed her. A hook nose, dark eyes that sparkled cunningly, a low brow crowned with a mass of rough, frizzy hair, and sham diamond ear-rings. She wore an old stuff dress, once

black, but no longer black now. The successive shakings of the old door-mat, week after week, had dredged her with dust which was never shaken off.

Over her plump shoulders peered the head of Rachel, her daughter, a girl of some sixteen years, a very counterpart of her mother, face and all; only, of course, better and brighter looking. Her large, handsome eyes, not yet spoilt by craft and hard bargaining, were heightened by the glowing colour of her cheeks. Rachel's chin was half buried on her mother's shoulder; she loved to rest it there; she was gazing over it into the outer world.

"Well, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Cohen, as she was confronted by Peter, who had at last summoned up courage to go to the shop door. "Well, my dear, and what is it I can do for you? If it's them boots you want to pledge, we can't oblige you, that we can't. I couldn't advance sixpence on 'em, not if you was drove ever so hard. The window's full of old boots and shoes, and so's the shop. Cohen was that angry with me last night 'cause I'd taken another pair, and they were a deal more serviceable than yours. 'Rebecca,' says he, 'you'll be my ruin if you goes on allowing money on any more boots, you will. They ain't worth no money, so of course they never comes for 'em again, and we're the losers, and have got 'em on our hands.' Weren't those your father's very words, Rachel?"

"Yes, mother, they was; only he said a lot more than you've left out and I can't remember."

Rachel smiled, and showed a row of fine white teeth.

"I don't want to part wi' 'em; they were father's,"

said Peter, after listening patiently to all Mrs. Cohen had to say.

Not heeding Peter's remark, she went on, "Now, if you were looking for a nice strong pair of boots, just a little the worse for wear, why then, that's quite a different affair; I could suit you exactly. Boys grow so fast, 'tisn't often they comes back to redeem 'em, 'cause, don't you know, they've grown out of 'em."

"'Tisn't boots at all," said Peter. "It's a fiddle I'm after."

"A fiddle? well, I never! Did you ever hear of such a thing, Rachel, as a boy without a bit of shoe-leather on his feet wanting a fiddle?"

Rachel's only business in life seemed to be to confirm her mother's opinions, so she smiled, showed her teeth once again, and said, "Never."

"In the name of fortune, child," added Mrs. Cohen, "whatever made ye think of coming to Isaac Cohen's shop, with the sign of three golden balls, for a fiddle? We haven't got no fiddles, have we, Rachel?"

"No, mother, except—" Rachel was forgetting herself and exceeding her calling.

"Can't you hold your tongue, Rachel? Didn't I say we hadn't a fiddle?"

Rachel withdrew her chin a little way off from its resting-place on her mother's shoulder.

Peter held the money safely grasped in one hand, whilst with the other he took a crumpled, dirty piece of paper, the pawnbroker's ticket, out of his pocket.

Mrs. Cohen was silent, and looked confounded. She

guessed the truth. She knew she had the old blind man's fiddle safe enough ; but she was hoping to turn a penny by it, for that very morning a gentleman had been looking at it, and offered to give a good price for it. She told him it had been so long in pawn she thought she might sell it ; but must ask Cohen first. She promised to give him an answer if he would call the next day. Here was a pretty kettle of fish ! Just at the wrong moment the old blind man had sent for his fiddle !

"What have ye got in your hand, my dear ?" She knew without telling, but still she hoped against hope.

"It's the ticket," said Peter, holding it tight.

"Let me look at it, boy."

There was no denying it. Facts are facts, and pawn tickets, with name and number, and description of article pledged, cannot be set aside.

"Yes, I see," continued Mrs. Cohen, reading the ticket, "Fiddle—John Figis, three shillings and sixpence."

She fervently wished she did not see it, for the gentleman's offer was ten times that amount.

"I remember all about it," said Rachel, peering over her mother's shoulder down on to the ticket. "'Twas an old blind man —"

Mrs. Cohen silenced her with a nudge of her elbow and said,—

"Of course he was blind, Rachel, or he would have seen what a shabby old fiddle he was offering. Three and sixpence was a lot to pledge it for ; but there—if there's one thing above another Cohen and I have to be thankful for, it is that we've got our feelin's, we have. As I often

say, to get on and make the business pay, the trade
oughtn't to have hearts at all. Cohen wasn't nowhere
handy at the time, but when the man told me he was
forced to pledge the old thing to get food for his dying
wife, I says, 'I'll give ye three and sixpence, 'tis nothing
but giving, when you've only got a old fiddle for good
money.' Cohen did scold right and left when he come in,
didn't he, Rachel?"

"Yes, mother, only——"

"Can't you be quiet, Rachel? don't be so pert and
forward."

"Here comes father; he've woke up," persisted Rachel.

CHAPTER VII

THE PAWNSHOP



R. COHEN was short and thick-set,—a genuine old Jew,—with a very red face and a very prominent hook nose. His receding forehead was bald and wrinkled, his eyes sharp and piercing and bloodshot; they could see every article through and through, flaws and all, at a glance, weighing them at his *own* valuation in a moment. “It is nought, it is nought,” was his motto, when he took things on pledge. His hair was grizzly and unkempt, like his ragged beard. He wore a black cloth coat, with waistcoat and belongings to match, all shiny with grease and much wear. He was only just awake,—he always slept after his early dinner, leaving Mrs. Cohen and Rachel to mind the shop. Hearing the sound of voices, he thought he would rouse himself and go and see after the bargain his missus was evidently driving. He settled there was not much to be got out of Peter, except that sometimes boys picked up things, and were ready to get rid of them for very little money.

“Vell, Rebecca, and vot’s it all about?”

With a very expressive wink of her cunning eye she said,—

“ We haven’t got no fiddles, have we, father ? ”

“ Vell, I can’t say, Beckie, fiddles is more in your department than mine ; but ve can’t make von if ve haven’t got von, dat’s pretty clear. Do you understand me, boy ? ”

After noticing Mrs. Cohen’s winks he thought it safest to affect entire ignorance and take up a neutral position. With another series of winks she handed him the ticket to read, saying,—

“ I was just saying we would look for the fiddle, but it is so long ago it was brought here I dare say it has got hid somewhere.”

Turning to Peter she added,—

“ Look round yourself, my dear, and see if you can find it.”

He could not see it, or anything like it, although he peeped behind a lot of clothes of all kinds hanging on pegs round the walls of the shop, and no wonder, for the fiddle, with its broken strings, was in the little room at the end of the shop, just as the gentleman left it.

Peter was so bitterly disappointed he could have cried. Mrs. Cohen noticed how distressed he seemed, and wondered why it was, and what the old blind man and his fiddle were to him. Her “ feelings ” did not get the better of her, however ; she merely said,—

“ Can’t you find it, my dear ? Well, I’ll tell you what we will do,—we can’t do it to-day, it will take such a long time,—we’ll hunt through all the goods and try to find it. You had better call again— ”

“ Not to-morrow,” interrupted Mr. Cohen, who quite took in his wife’s policy. “ Not to-morrow—dat is our

Shabbath, and not the next day—dat is your Shabbath. Come Monday, boy, do you hear?"

Peter heard it all plain enough, but he was not satisfied.

"I suppose you'd like to have the ticket, my dear?" said Mrs. Cohen, smiling pleasantly. "Look here, Cohen, just write down what's on the ticket—your wristband will do,—I haven't a bit of paper handy. No. 2099, John Figis, fiddle, three shillin's and sixpence."

"And a lot of money, too, to advance for such a horrid poor thing, that's got about as much tune in it as a hungry, screeching cat," replied the old Jew, finishing off the pencil notes on his dirty white cuff.

Having spoken his mind to his own satisfaction—he knew the fiddle was worth much more—he retired into his back parlour to sleep away the afternoon.

Peter took the ticket and left the shop. As he went he shook his rough head of hair slowly, sadly. He did not like the look of things. He could not make out why—if he had got the ticket all right and the money in his hand—he could not have the fiddle. He lost all his cheeriness, and did not do much whistling that day.

* * * * *

Bab got home earlier than usual that evening. She had been lucky and sold all her winks, in spite of the time she lost in court and taking care of the old blind man. She had her reward.

—“They who think of others, and their sorrows share,
Happy are, for they are blessed whom others' burdens bear.”

Bab was glad to get back: she wanted to help her mother make her fur caps.

Bab was a first-rate hand at matching the bits, and fitting them together ready for her mother to sew and cut them into shape. Bab had a lot, too, to tell about Dandie and the old blind man in the police court, and her surprise at seeing Peter brought up before the magistrate.

“He looked so awful frightened, mother, and was all of a tremble. I could see that even up in the gallery, where I was. I made sure he’d done something wicked stealing and so on, but he hadn’t. He was obliged to appear in court ‘cause ‘twas all through him Dan was found shut up in a rabbit-hutch. You wouldn’t believe how savage the man who stole the dog looked at Peter when he was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison with hard labour. I should have been horridly afraid of the man, but Peter took no notice of him or his savage look. Peter seemed to be only thinking of Dan, and pitying him. The dog looked so miserable.”

After a pause, Bab went on. Her mother was too busy to give much heed to what she was saying,—

“Peter must be a queer boy, for when me and the blind man came out of court, he wasn’t nowhere to be seen, and he has never turned up since. I went back with Mr. Figis to the place where he always sits—John Figis is the blind man’s name, mother—for Dan didn’t seem to care to lead him. I don’t believe he was really able to, the dog was so weak and shaky on his legs, and

sort of foolish, like an idiot, only I don't s'pose dogs ever goes idiotic, they goes mad. When we got to the corner Dan laid down and curled hisself up, as if he was dead beat, and went fast asleep, just as I do when I'm tired, and can't keep awake. I guessed Peter would come every minute, but he didn't, so I waited and sat down alongside of Mr. Figis, for I thought as Dandie wasn't awake there would be nobody to look after the pennies. He got a lot of coppers, and I sold some winks. He said I brought him luck, but I can't see how that could be, I didn't ask anybody for anything, I only sang out every now and then, 'Winks O! Winks!' Folks stared a bit at us; p'raps they knew we were just come out of court. Mustn't Peter be a queer boy, mother, after taking so much pains to hunt for Dandie never to go near him nor his master?"

"Boys will be boys, Bab. I've never met with one yet that had a man's head on his shoulders. He has got a good heart, I'm certain of that. I dare say some idle boys got hold of him and tempted him to go with them somewhere. We mustn't be hard upon Peter. He hasn't a mother to look after him, nor a father neither. Whatever would become of you, Bab, if I was to die, I can't say."

"The magistrate offered to put him in a home, mother, but Peter wouldn't go. I don't blame him. I should hate to be shut up like a sheep in a pen, with never a thought or a will of my own. There's that umbrella—Peter's never been for it."

"Law! no, Bab, I'd quite forgot it; never mind the

umbrella, I'm ready for some more bits. I shall never get these here caps finished if you sit idle with your hands crossed on your lap, as if you was half asleep and dreamin'."

"Where can Peter be?" asked Bab, quite unmindful of the fur caps.

"I'm sure I can't say, Bab; no more than I can tell where all the flies go to in winter. I daresay the boy's somewhere all right."

"Peter disappoints me, mother," said Bab. She picked up some bits of fur and handed them to her mother.

"What's that you were saying, my dear, about Peter?"

"He disappoints me, mother."

"Why, to hear you talk, Bab, any one would think you was grown-up; but there, children that have to knock about the streets selling winks and such-like to help to get their own living do seem to grow old before the time. Ah me! the longer you live, Bab, the more you'll find that a good many other folks, besides Peter, will disappoint you—not that I can see what the poor boy has done to put ye out. I wish I could mend him up a bit and keep him tidy. When he comes for the umbrella I'll see what can be done."

Had Bab only guessed what Peter was after she would never have said, "Peter disappoints me."

Bab's mother was right: her child was far older in thought and in her ways than she was in years. In her own untrained way she was always thinking of others and trying to be of some use to them. And so it

happened she took Peter under her special care, as if he were a charge entrusted to her. She was not blind to his faults ; she pitied him. His kindness of heart and unselfish generosity had won her childish love. Life, even her own young life, meant something *real* to Bab. She was always in earnest. Her every-day work, trifling as it appeared to the common mind, to those who could see nothing in selling winks, and such-like, to be worth any trouble or thought, was to her a thing, if worth doing at all, worth doing well, and with a heart, and so she worked bravely on. She seemed to possess a natural turn for work, as other children had for play.

* * * * *

Mrs. Cobb, Liza-Loo's mother, was sitting patiently in her usual place behind the counter ; a batch of new bread, hot and steaming, just in front of her, was ready for any customer who might happen to come into the shop. She was busy reading a newspaper,—a penny daily paper was the one luxury she allowed herself, she had no time or taste for any other kind of literature. It was not money altogether thrown away : they were always handy for putting up parcels, and if she had any over, her neighbour, a butcher, was ready at any moment to buy them. Besides, it was a duty to watch the markets and learn the price of flour. She usually finished off with the police courts. This morning, somehow, she began at the wrong end, and read them first.

Liza-Loo was sitting in the small back-parlour, making out the weekly bills ready for sending with the bread. This was the one thing her education enabled

her to do to help her mother, and she liked to exhibit her own proficiency in writing a fine hand with a scratchy steel pen and the palest ink.

“Liza-Loo!” exclaimed Mrs. Cobb, “do come in here and listen!”

“What is it, mother? a murder or——”

“Tisn’t nothing of that sort, Liza-Loo; you know I never read such horrid things. You just come in and listen to what I’ve got to read to you, it’s about that boy: he’s been had up before the magistrate at the police court.”

“I knew I was right, mother! Didn’t I tell you he was a young rascal?”

Liza-Loo tossed her head in triumph. She added,—

“I don’t look for or expect to find honesty along with rags and bare feet.”

“Don’t you be in such a tearing hurry with your conclusions, Liza-Loo. He wasn’t had up for anything he had done amiss, but only as a witness about a dog that was stolen from the poor blind man he bought the bun for. You just come in and listen.”

Luckily she was not interrupted by customers: so she had plenty of time to read the whole account, which was a full report, and rather long. When she came nearly to the end, and read about the magistrate giving Peter five shillings out of the poor-box, because the policeman spoke up for him, Liza-Loo opened her eyes wide with astonishment. Her mother was not a little proud of being in the right after all.

“There now, Liza-Loo!” she exclaimed, pointing a fat

finger to the police report in the newspaper. "Now tell me which of us is right, you or me?"

"At all events, mother, you haven't got your umbrella yet. When the boy brings that back I'll believe in him," persisted Eliza-Loo.

"You always were as obstinate as a mule," said her mother. "All the schooling I've given you hasn't improved you a bit. I like the good old-fashioned education, when they taught a child to honour father and mother, and to obey them. In these days folks don't seem to take the commandments into account at all, nor father nor mother neither. You may as well try to make good flour bread without real brewer's yeast as to leave the duty of obedience and the honour due to us parents out of a child's education. You may laugh, Liza-Loo, but it's a true gospel—it's gospel itself. There can't be no better nor sounder teaching than that. I'm quite content to hold with St. Paul and what he said about it. I was made to learn the words when I was six years old, and I've never forgotten 'em. I can repeat 'em still, word for word, except I'm hurried. The verses are in St. Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. Any one would think *they* didn't want no such teaching, because they were saints and faithful brethren, but they did; it just shows what he thought about it, for he says—now Liza-Loo, mind you listen, and don't go looking out of window." Mrs. Cobb closed her eyes and joined her hands, finger to finger and thumb to thumb, as she used to do in school, long years ago, drawing in her breath every now and then. "'Children, obey your parents in all

things ; for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord.' 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth.' Your grandmother—and she was a real good woman—used to say she wished the words were graven on every child's heart, and so do I. Law ! Liza-Loo, don't you remember those little old blue and white plates of your grandmother's that I've got put away in the cupboard ? They tell you what George the Third thought of the Bible, for there's the king in the very middle of the plate, sitting down, dressed in his ermine cloak and gold chain and all ; 'tis quite a picture, it is, and he looks so pleasant. Standing just in front of him is a ragged little boy without shoes and stockings. The king is handing him a Bible, and he says to the child, 'I hope the time will come when every poor child in my dominions will be able to read the Bible' ; and his wish has come pretty well true, it has. Ah there, I've nobody to blame but myself. I ought to have taught you those texts about obeying your father and mother, instead of letting you have your own way, and learning nothing but rhyming stuff, not but what 'How doth the little busy bee' and such-like are very good in their way, only they don't stand by ye as Bible words do. It's never too late to mend. I wish you'd learn those texts next Sunday. It's good for young and old to store up Scripture in one's memory, for a rainy day, as you may say."

"All right, mother. I can almost repeat the verses by

heart already ; and now I'll go and finish making out the weekly bills, or they won't be ready for Jim when he takes out the bread. That's obeying you, isn't it ? Mind you call me if that boy brings back your umbrella !"

Eliza-Loo did not go on with her bills at once. She took down from a small hanging book-case—it never would hang straight—a smartly bound gilt-edged Bible. She made a kind of windmill of it, for although she knew the names of the books of the Bible by rote, like a parrot, she could not hit upon the right ones, so she blew the dust off the gilt edges and put it back in its place on the shelf, and took up her steel pen to finish the bills. She made up her mind to ask her mother to find the texts for her.

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT IN A DUST-BIN



PETER went away from the pawnshop very down-hearted. He did nothing all the rest of the day, just prowled about like a cat on the loose, with no particular object in view. He went anywhere, except where he thought he might knock up against either Bab or old Figis.

Figis. He was so afraid he should let out his secret if he met either one or the other; his pleasure would be quite spoilt if they guessed what he was after. He wanted to give the blind man "a real awful surprise," as he expressed it to his innermost self. And yet he felt quite bursting. The five shillings and the fiddle were almost too great a secret to keep to himself. It was sympathy he wanted: only he did not know what name to give to his want. It would be nice to tell Bab; why didn't she wait for him outside the court? She cared more for her winks than for him, that was clear. If he told her now, she would be sure to let it all out. Girls were all the same, just like sieves, and were only made to let everything go through; so Peter made up his mind if

he heard "Winks O ! Winks!" he'd turn round and go down another street. He picked up a big pin and pinned his pocket together, the one where the money was, he was so afraid of losing it. He was tired of holding the gaping hole; besides, people might notice it, and guess what he had got inside; if they caught him clutching it so tight. Nobody would notice the big pin—it was old, and dim, and dirty, it would not shine; it answered his purpose exactly.

Peter had a copper left—old Figis gave it to him—so he got some food and a cup of coffee. He would rather have starved than spend any of the five shillings before Monday.

At night he crept into a dust-bin in the area of an empty house. It was rather a deep hole, but he could manage just to peep out by resting his chin on the ledge of the opening. The door had long ago swung itself off its hinges and was lying on the stones below. He was afraid to go to sleep, lest anybody should come and rob him of his money; so he stared up at the large, round moon, and thought the face he saw there was looking down at him; he seemed to be watching him. The moon soon sailed away behind a forest of tall chimneys and high roofs, and was lost to sight. Its cold, grey light fell full on the opposite side of the street. Peter was so glad it did not shine down on him instead; if it had, he must have ducked his head, lest a bobby should spy him out. He knew from experience bobbies always had a fancy for dust-bins, and stopping and looking down into the areas of empty houses, and eyeing the dust-bins and every

corner, holding on by the spikes of the iron railings all the while.

The deep shadow cast over the area was all in Peter's favour. When the moon had sailed away out of his sight, he took to counting the stars in the patch of sky overhead. He started from a big one, but he soon lost his way amongst them, and had to begin over and over again. He never got further than twelve; at last they appeared to grow hazy and confused. Somehow he did not seem to be counting them at all, but only to be staring vacantly up and up into the dim unknown, and then his chin dropped off its resting-place, and he sank down in a heap on the floor of the dust-hole, fast asleep, and forgot everything—his precious five shillings, the fiddle, the old blind man, and Bab!

Peter slept on soundly till the morning, when the pathetic cry of “Swee—ep! swee—ep!” awoke him. He rubbed his eyes open, and wondered where he was, and what had happened. It was very dark and dreary down at the bottom where he was lying, and the air smelt so dusty he could scarcely breathe. He felt stiff and cramped, just as if he never could pull himself straight again. He tried to get up and shake himself; he wanted just to look out of the opening, and take in the real state of things, and see how he was to get out. He listened; he heard another cry, not a pathetic one this time, not “Swee—ep! swee—ep!” but “Winks! Winks O!” It was Bab on her early rounds. How little she guessed that Peter was close at hand, in a dust-hole, listening to the cheery tones of her voice!

He was half inclined to pop his head out of the opening and call to Bab and beckon to her, and tell her to wait for him till he could get out of his hiding-place. It was a sore temptation ; but he resisted it, and held his tongue—it was hard work—and remained hidden until the sound of “ Winks ! ” had died quite away, and all in the dreary street was once more silent.

The big pin was all right, and so was the money ; that was a comfort. He listened attentively. He could not hear any footsteps, so he crept out of the dust-bin, through the opening, up the steps, over the rails, down on to the pavement. He was quite safe ; not a soul to be seen, nobody looking out of the windows opposite. They seemed to be vacant, every one of them, to judge by the large bills in the windows and the boards all awry fastened on to the railings. Empty houses could not want winks, so it was not likely that Bab would come back that way. Nobody would guess where he had spent the night, unless they noticed how *dusty* he looked. He shook himself once or twice, but he could not get rid of it ; the dust was damp, and clung to his clothes and his hair. Boy-like, he soon forgot all about it, and went on his way.

It was Saturday, the Jews’ Sabbath. Peter knew nothing about that, and wondered why the Jews weren’t content to have everybody else’s Sunday. Still, Mr. Cohen had told him about it, and he must be right. Sabbath or no Sabbath, nothing would satisfy Peter till he went himself round to the shop—it was not very far off—to see if it really was shut. He had a kind of vague

hope it *might* be open. We all manage to get a little hope out of the “*might be’s*” we fondly cling to; so we can’t blame Peter or think him foolish. The shop was shut, and the window blind drawn down; it did not quite reach the bottom of the window. There was method in this: the Cohens liked passers-by to see the tops of the leather boots, and the old accordion, and the flageolet that nobody ever seemed to care for or want. At all events, there could be no harm in a short blind. He could not make it longer, pull it as hard as he could, said old Cohen. Peter saw these things, but no fiddle, although, like a bird looking for a worm, he put his head on one side and peeped and peeped, now with one eye, and now with the other.

Peter haunted the shop all the day through, thinking some one might come out and notice him, and perhaps tell him, although it was their Sabbath, that they had found the fiddle, and he could take it away then and there. It was a boy’s idea, but poor Peter was only a boy, full of impatient hope.

The shop door was never opened. Nobody came out; they were all fast asleep—their idea of keeping the Sabbath and resting! The next day was real Sunday, and every shop would be shut. Peter knew that, and never questioned the rights of it. Whilst his father lived, Peter always went with him to a mission hall. They could go there in their every-day working clothes; they had no others to go in. The missioner invited people to come just as they were, and to bring their children, as many as they liked, babies and all; and so Peter and

his father went. All were welcome, and there the poor man found peace and comfort, and food for his soul enough and to spare—enough to take home and think about as he toiled all the day long, or sat hungry, waiting for work to come in.

Peter, if he learned nothing else, learned to sit still and listen.

Perhaps—who can tell?—many days after, the bread then cast upon the waters would rise and be found. The missioner was sowing the word of life amongst weary toilers just as the husbandman sows his seed along the dry, furrowed earth.

Some words of life and love may have fallen on the untilled ground of the ragged boy's heart, there to sleep till the Spirit of God should bid it live and bear fruit.

When his father died Peter gave up going to the Mission Hall, and so Sunday dropped out of his week, and one day and all the seven were alike.

The Jew had spoken to him of *his* Sabbath and Peter's Sunday. He remembered that, but it brought with it nothing for him to do. All the day he was thinking of the fiddle, and longing for the lazy hours to go and bring Monday. In this manner he lounged about till daylight was gone, melted into twilight, till evening set in. How he wished time would go faster!

And so he went along the dimly-lighted streets. Presently he came to a bright spot. Gas-lights burning clearly threw a stream of glowing gas-shine through the open doors of a mission hall across the road and over the narrow

pavement. Peter looked inside. There it was brighter still, all the corners penetrated, nothing dark, no dreariness lingered anywhere. A kind-faced man stood at the entrance. He seemed to be saying, though he did not speak, " Yet there is room ! Room, room, still room ! Oh, enter, enter now ! " Peter stopped, and their eyes met. Peter's foot was on the step, the only one ; it was so easy to slip in. Some secret attraction, some unseen influence seemed to be drawing him. Almost before he had either time to think or turn round and go away, the good man took him by the hand, and led him inside the building and placed him on a bench. How cheerful and pleasant it all looked ! so full of warm welcome, even for him ; so unlike the dreary, unsympathising world outside ! Very soon the same man came in and sat down by his side. He had placed Peter on his own bench, close to the door ; there he could see if there was anybody outside who could be invited to enter in. Very soon the people sang a hymn, only a short one. Peter listened. He caught the words :—

"O King of saints, O Lord,
Mighty, all-conquering Word,
Son of the highest God,
Wielding His wisdom's rod ;
Our stay when cares annoy,
Giver of endless joy ;
Of all our mortal race
Saviour of boundless grace,
O Jesus, hear ! "

Peter liked the singing. It seemed to kindle the spark

of life which never dies out of the heart, and to revive the joy of his early childhood.

His eyes glistened, and his lips quivered as if he were longing to sing too, and so he was. For the moment a flush of colour came into his pale cheeks.

Next in simple words, as all prayer should be, the missioner prayed. Peter tried to follow him as best he could. It was just the breathing of an unspoken cry into the dim unknown. We have no need to say to our Father in heaven, "Hide not Thine ear at my breathing, at my cry," for God's ear is ever ready to listen to the half-uttered prayer of every one of us.

After a time Peter grew weary. He got up to go away, but the man gave him a nudge, and pulled him down on to the bench again, saying, if he sat patiently a little longer there would be more singing. So Peter stayed on, only every now and then just jumping up to look over and between the broad shoulders in front of him. There was nothing to be seen, only rows of people, all more or less shabby wayfarers. The good man did not mind Peter being rather fidgety, for he hoped if he let him do as he liked he would perhaps come again. Peter soon got tired of moving up and down, and was on the point of sinking down on the bench half asleep, when he fancied he saw Bab's rough head leaning on her mother's shoulder. This was quite enough to wake him up effectually and set him thinking. He never dreamt of seeing Bab amongst the people. He wanted so much to ask her if the old umbrella was safe, and yet he felt sure if he spoke to Bab he would let out the secret about the fiddle. That would be a pity;

so he made up his mind he'd rush out of the door into the street, and run far away before Bab and her mother moved from their seats.

Whilst all this was passing through Peter's thoughts the missioner began his address. Peter caught the first words. They were the text, "*Your Father which is in heaven.*" They were the very words to strike a fatherless boy. They set him tingling with life to his finger-tips. He forgot all about Bab and the fiddle and the old umbrella and everything else except those wonderful words he had just heard: "*Your Father which is in heaven.*" Peter was rivetted. He never moved, but sat with his mouth wide open and fixed eyes, listening to the missioner. There was much that Peter could not quite understand, but for the first time in his short life he dimly realized the Fatherhood of God, realized that the great God who made not only the poor, ragged boy, but everything else, was his Father: that as his Father God knew what things he needed, and not only so, but that he, even poor, ragged Peter, might pray to Him and ask Him to be good and kind to him. What a friend Peter seemed to have found! "*Our Father,*" said the missioner, "*is not a distant or a far-off God, but is very near to us always.*" And then he spoke of the intensity of God's love in sending His only Son Jesus down from heaven to die for the sins of the whole world, that we, through His merits, might live a life of endless happy days in His kingdom! And then they sang another hymn:—

'Oh, come to the merciful Saviour who calls you,
Oh, come to the Lord who forgives and forgets;

Though dark be the fortune on earth that befalls you,
There's a bright home above where the sun never sets.

“Then come to the Saviour whose mercy grows brighter
The longer you look at the depth of His love;
And fear not! 'tis Jesus, and life's cares grow lighter
As you think of the home and the glory above.”

That evening at the Mission Hall Peter had learnt a lesson in the only thing worth knowing—that Jesus loved him, and that God was no far-distant God, but an all-present Father.

When the short service was over, the man asked Peter if he had any father.

“No,” said Peter. He shook his head sadly. “No, I haven’t got no father. He’s dead, and so’s mother. I ain’t got nobody belonging to me. They tell me the world’s a precious big place with lots of people in it, but none of ‘em belongs to me.”

“P’raps not, boy. But there’s a world up above where there’s an innumerable company of folks which no man can count. Maybe your father and mother’s among ‘em. You’ll see ‘em again up there if you’ll love and serve God and be a real good boy. There’s hope for all down here, and love for all up in heaven, ay, and down here too.”

Bab and her mother must have slipped out whilst the man was talking to Peter, for when he looked round for them they were gone.

Somehow when Peter found himself once more in the dull and dreary street, he did not feel nearly so much alone

as he used to. Those wonderful words, "*Your Father which is in heaven*," still rung in his ears, and he looked up into the small patch of starry sky overhead as if a window had been opened, and he could find his Father there.

CHAPTER IX

“I AIN’T NO DOG, NOR A YOUNG RASCAL”



PETER had another night's experience in the dust-bin. His eyes felt very wide open, the effect of staring so long at the flaring gas-lamps in the Mission Hall, but in spite of it all he fell fast asleep as soon as he curled himself round in one of the corners. And no wonder, he was so tired. He dreamed odd, confused dreams, in which the fiddle and the singing were mixed together. Somebody seemed to be playing hymn tunes on the fiddle. He distinctly heard the music, but could see no one. Then suddenly the fiddle flew up and up, kite like. He thought it was one. The worst of it was, although he held the string tightly in his hand, and went on winding and winding it round and round into a big ball, he could not catch it or pull it a bit nearer. Do what he would, the kite-like fiddle soared away higher and higher, until it was lost behind some clouds which suddenly turned into the Cohens' pawnshop.

Then Peter awoke. It was still early, but people were up and about. The distant rumble of carts and omnibuses told him it was quite time he should be stirring

too. He just looked up into the bit of sky overhead, to be quite sure the fiddle, kite-like, was not flying about there. Of course he did not see it; that was only a dream. He washed his face at the nearest pump, and then ran off in the direction of the pawnshop. He reached it just as the old Jew was pulling up the inside blind. He was yawning, and looked half asleep, as if even the rest of the two Sabbath days had proved insufficient to freshen him up. The shop door was still fastened. Peter shook it, and knocked and kicked it, but the Jew took no notice of his repeated efforts to gain an entrance. It was quite clear he was not going to open his shop or attend to business until he and his missus and Rachel had finished their breakfast. There was nothing to be done but for Peter to have patience and wait. It was dull work looking into the window, and staring at the old boots and all the other different articles. So with a heavy heart he went away. It seemed to him his dream was coming true, and he never should be able to grasp the fiddle.

In the next street there was the sound of Punch and Judy's drum, an irresistible temptation. Was ever a boy known to turn his back on Punch? Never!

The man had just pitched, and was disappearing behind the green baize when Peter reached the spot. Fiddle and everything else forgotten, Peter waited to see the whole of it from beginning to end, and even when it was over, followed close behind the man with the hope of witnessing another performance, but the man met with no further luck; so, having gone a long way off from the pawnshop, Peter bethought himself of the fiddle and ran

back. The door was open now. Was he dreaming still? He distinctly heard the sound of a fiddle. It was no dream. There inside the shop stood a gentleman playing it, whilst the old Jew and Mrs. Cohen and Rachel—she was peeping over her mother's shoulder—were listening with open mouths and ears.

Peter dashed in, and seizing hold of the gentleman's arm, exclaimed,—

“That's uncle's fiddle, and I've come for it. I've got the money all right, pinned into my trouser pocket.”

“Get you gone, you rude boy,” said the old Jew, pushing Peter away. “Vat do you know about dat fiddle? It is a vary fine one. Your uncle's is vary, vary bad, not worth nothink at all. Don't you take no notice of this young rascal, sir. He is neither Jew nor Gentile, only a good-for-nothing hungry dog. You go on, sir, if you please, with your music, and I will turn him out and lock de door.”

“No, no, don't do that. Let me hear what the boy has got to say for himself.”

The old Jew made one more effort to get Peter out of the shop; he saw his hope of turning money by the fiddle fast vanishing away. He knew well enough it was the blind man's own.

Peter was not going to be dealt with in this way. Oh that dream! The fiddle was rapidly flying up and away. Once again Peter clung to the gentleman's arm. Something seemed to tell him he would, at all events, listen to his story, and deal justly with him.

“I'm hungry, but I ain't no dog, nor a young rascal, and

them's facts. I've got the ticket and the money to take the fiddle out of pawn. It's Mr. Figis's, and I knows it——”

“Figis?” interrupted the gentleman. “I think the boy is telling the truth, for I saw that name written on the back of the fiddle and couldn't make it out. Look here, Cohen, there it is, written in a very shaky hand in ink——”

“Uncle's blind, and can't write no better,” said Peter.

“There, my boy, is the poor man's fiddle: take it to him; tell him it's a very good one—he won't mind my having put new strings. I may come across him some day. Tell him if he ever wants to part with it I will give him much more than three shillings and sixpence for it. Look here, boy, give him my card.”

“Let the gen'lman have it now,” said Cohen, nudging Peter's elbow; “tell the blind man to keep his money in his pocket. Silver better than a fiddle any day, 'cept for rich folks like this here gen'lman.”

“No, no, Cohen,” said the gentleman; “let the poor fellow have his fiddle; he'll be glad to have it again if he loves the instrument as much as I love mine. I guess he hasn't got much besides to cheer him.”

“Only Dan and me;” Peter pulled his shaggy, tufted hair; “'cause he lost his wife and his fiddle just about the same time. He've been awful kind to me, he have.”

“Don't lose the card, boy, do ye hear? If ever you or the blind man want a friend, come to me. I believe you're an honest lad and kind-hearted by the way you've behaved about this fiddle.”

"Don't make too sure of his honesty, if you please, sir ; honesty *vary* rare article 'mongst them young chaps—that's *my* experience."

"We'll see about that, Cohen. Never mind about your experience. Every rule has its exception. Now, boy, be off with your fiddle."

Peter had taken out the big pin which fastened his trouser pocket, and was fumbling for the money at the very bottom of it.

"Don't trouble about the three and sixpence, boy," said the gentleman ; "I'll pay that ; so the poor man will have his fiddle and the money into the bargain."

The old Jew was angry, and looked disgusted, saying, as he put out his hand to take the silver, "Dat is vot I call throwing good money after a bad boy !"

As Peter ran off with the fiddle and the five shillings jingling together in his pocket, he thought his luck would never end !

Poor Peter ! the good fortune he made so sure of seemed all at once to be coming to nought, for he had only gone a little distance when he ran up against a policeman. Peter was just rounding the corner of a street. He thought it was all over with him !

"I say, youngster," said the man, spreading out his arms to stop him, "where are you off to with that 'ere musical instrument ? It don't somehow seem to be quite in your line. Off to a gutter concert, eh ? And you just borrowed a fiddle without leave, eh ? I guess you'd best come along with me."

That horrid dream rushed into Peter's mind ! The

fiddle would really be taken from him just when he thought he had grasped it so tightly and surely!

"'Tisn't mine at all," said Peter, hardly able to speak for want of breath. "It isn't mine; it's the old blind man's, and I've just been and taken it out of pawn for him at Mr. Cohen's shop, two streets off after you've turned this corner."

"Oh, ah, all right, I see how 'tis. I remember you now. You were with the blind man in court about his dog that was stolen, and the magistrate gave ye five shillin's out of the poor-box. I thought I knew your face."

"I've got the money in my pocket now," said Peter.

"And mind you keep it there."

The man stood and watched Peter as he ran down the street until he was out of sight, thinking he was a curious specimen of a gutter boy. He wished there were more boys like him.

Peter found the old blind man sitting in his usual place at the corner of the street. Dan was curled up at his feet, whilst Bab sat by his side. Peter caught sight of her a long way off. She had taken to look after the poor old man now Peter, as she thought, had forsaken him. They could not at all account for his absence. Just at that moment they were talking about him and wondering what had become of him; Bab was attracted by suddenly seeing Dan get up, wag his tail, and run away; the sight of Peter had roused the little spirit left in the poor dog.

"There's Peter!" exclaimed Bab. "He's waving some



"There's Peter! He's waving some queer-looking thing in the air."

queer-looking thing in the air. He's an odd little chap, if ever there was one!"

"Is it really Peter, or only one of yer old pranks, Bab? I fancy there's something in the sound of the footstep that is like him, and yet——"

Before Bab had time to reply Peter had flung himself down by the side of the old man, exclaiming,—

"I've come at last, uncle; here's yer fiddle; I got it out of the pawnshop!"

Peter's story was soon told, from the beginning to the very end. The old man could scarcely believe his ears; it sounded so strange, and was so unexpected.

"It's most too late, Peter. My fiddling days are over," he said; and yet his upturned, sightless eyes were glazed with pleasure.

"It's too late, Peter. All the same, it's real good and kind of you, that it is. I can't think how it ever came into your mind."

The old man took the fiddle. As he drew the bow lovingly across the strings tears rolled fast down his cheeks. He played a few bars of "Robin Adair." "That's the tune my poor old missus loved best. Poor soul! The last time she asked for it I couldn't play it to her—I had parted with my fiddle. It went to my heart to do it; there was nothing else left to put away. I was forced to do it to get her some nourishment. She never knew 'twas gone; they were her last words. She fell asleep, and was gone before she woke again. She wouldn't want my poor music up there. No, she'd be listening to the harpers; ay, and better still, to the singing of the

'New Song,' and may be joining in it too—she'd a pretty voice, like a bird's, when she was young. She'd like to sing about Jesus slain for us, to redeem us from our sins by His precious blood—you're both too young to understand about *that*—and the glory of our home above."

"I was in Cross Street Mission Hall last night," said Peter.

"Never!" interrupted Bab. "Mother and I was there; we didn't see you."

"I heard some lovely singing," said Peter, not listening to Bab. "P'raps, uncle, 'twas something like the 'New Song,' for 'twas about Jesus and the bright home and glory above. The missioner told us a deal I'd never heard before. He said we've all a Father up in heaven, and that He is always looking after us, and taking care of us, and helping us, and giving us the things we want. I shouldn't wonder if 'twas 'our Father' sent me the money and you your fiddle, eh, uncle?"

The old man made no reply; his mind had gone back to the happier past. This time he played "Robin Adair" right through: Peter and Bab listened wonderingly. Dan perked up his ears and cocked his head to one side, and howled! He could not make out what his old master was up to.

Peter soon found out from Bab that the old umbrella was safe in the corner in her mother's room where he left it.

"Oh, yes," said Bab, a little pettishly, "it's safe enough, but it's high time you should come for it, if you ever mean to mend it."

Bab felt rather put out and vexed because Peter had not confided to her his idea of getting the fiddle out of pawn, and all the while, too, she had harboured unkind thoughts about him, and called him selfish and cruel because he had left old Figis so long, and never even waited for him when he came out of the police court. She was, in truth, angry with herself now, but instead of allowing herself to be wrong, she vented her pettishness on Peter. This is always the way with so many of us.

Peter took no notice of what she said, or of the little reproving toss of her head. He felt she was quite right: he ought to mend the umbrella at once.

That evening found him busy at work putting it in order in Bab's mother's room. It did not take him long to do, and a real good job he made of it, thanks to Bab, who sewed up all the holes in the cotton covering.

The first thing the next morning Peter carried it off in triumph. Very soon "Cobb, baker" stared him in the face, painted in yellow letters on a red ground. He knew he was right, for peeping into the shop, through glass bottles and over heaps of loaves and buns, he saw Mrs. Cobb herself, sitting behind the counter in the very place where he had left her the day he took away the old umbrella. Her face was beaming with gladness when she saw Peter enter the shop with the big umbrella neatly rolled up, with its brass ring to keep it in order.

"Liza-Loo!" she exclaimed triumphantly, as she opened and spread out the huge, tent-like thing. "Now tell me who's right,—you or me?"

"Well, and now you've got it," said Liza-Loo, "who's goin' to use it? I shan't."

"I don't s'pose you will, with your new-fangled ideas about progress and such-like. 'Twill keep me nice and dry many a rainy winter night goin' and returnin' from the mission hall. You wouldn't have spoilt your best frock the other day if you'd had it up instead of that trumpery small thing that's only big enough to cover the crown of your hat."

Turning to Peter, Mrs. Cobb said, "There's your six-pence, my dear, and a cake, and thank'ee, too. If ever I've got another umbrella that wants mending, you shall do it. Oh, I never! if you haven't sewed up all the holes, and very neatly, too. However did you manage to do that? I never knew a boy use a needle so clever and handy-like."

"Please, I didn't do it; 'twas Bab. She ain't nothin' to me. She and her mother is awful clever patchin' bits of fur together and makin' it into caps. I haven't got any needles, nor thread, nor thimble neither. Bab's a real kind gal, that she is."

"If she's all that," said Mrs. Cobb, "she shall have a bun. I know you'll give it to her, and won't eat it yourself."

Peter shook his head; he thought it the most emphatic way of assuring her he would give it all right to Bab; and then ran away, proud as a peacock.

CHAPTER X

THE BROKEN LINK



DAN never again recovered his usual health and spirits.

The poor dog was thoroughly cowed by the cruel treatment he had received from the man who stole him.

Taking him away from his old master had, in truth, broken his heart.

No doubt he had brought it all upon himself: roving was the dog's nature, and his nature was too strong for him to resist.

Old Figis saw clearly enough that Dan was not the same. Everybody saw it, too, and pitied both the poor man and the dog. "Pity the survivor" was all old Figis ever said about it.

Dan was faithful to the end, but the end was not very far off.

Clearly Dan and his master were travelling together, hand in hand, down the steep towards the shadowy valley. It was hard to tell who would be the first to reach it and leave the other behind.

Peter saw it, too, but he could not realize, he would

not believe, that there was much the matter with the old man ; neither would Bab. Hope with the young is so strong and buoyant : it refuses to be crushed even by the inevitable. Sometimes Bab brought him a can of nice hot soup, made by her mother : a bone boiled with a bit of garlic ; Bab called it soup, and tried to think it was. The old man took it to oblige the child ; it just warmed him, that was all ; it did him no real good. Bab fancied it did ; that gave her pleasure. Peter spent some of his money on a nice thick comforter and some warm gloves for him. Passers-by wondered how the poor old man managed to get them : nobody ever knew, only Bab.

Summer and autumn were gone, it was fast growing cold and winter-like. It was very trying for old Figis, but he and Dan sat at the corner all the same and braved the weather. At last the day came when there was no blind man with his fiddle and dog to be seen in their old place. The strength of his legs was gone, he was too weak to walk ; all he could do was to stay "at home," as he called his small back room in the lodging-house. He managed somehow to pay for a room to himself ; he could not bear the noise and over-crowding of the common kitchen. He and Dan had nobody to interrupt them there. Sometimes the tunes he played on the fiddle attracted the children to his door ; they would even open it and peep in. He did not mind that : Dan took very good care they did not intrude themselves inside. The old man knew when they were there by their voices and the shuffling of their feet as they pretended to dance to

the sound of the fiddle. It was a solace to him to think his poor music gave pleasure to somebody.

Peter and Bab very soon missed him from his place at the corner of the street. One morning they happened to be there together.

"Peter, he's ill, he must be," said Bab; "or he'd be sure to be here."

"Let's go, Bab, and find out," said Peter; "that's the best way. He may want us."

The poor old man was sitting in a chair by the fireside propped up with a hard cushion, a perfect wreck of himself. Peter sprang forward and looked in his face; it wore an expression of peace. Peter's face fell at what he read there: he did not speak a word, but the old man guessed his thoughts.

"Peter," he said, "I told you I was goin' fast; and, Bab, you've often heard me say so too, haven't ye? And my words are come true. Ah! the day must come for the pitcher to be broken at the fountain. I was made of stouter stuff than most folks, or I couldn't have stood what I have; but the best pitcher breaks with over much knocking, and the time comes when a man goeth to his long home."

Peter and Bab tried to speak, but they couldn't. They knelt down on the floor, one on either side of him, and each took one of his thin hands; this did not help them a bit, they could not think of anything to say; they only stroked his hands and looked at each other; their voices were choked.

Dan just feebly wagged his tail, as if to tell them he

understood it all as well as they did. He could do no more.

The fiddle was in the old man's lap ; it spoke to him, without words, when no one else was near.

“ Don't grieve for me, children. It's quite time my poor old body should cease to cumber the ground. When I'm free of it I shall *see*—yes, *see*—the light of a gladder day than ever shone down here in this poor place—I know I shall, for God loves me and cares for me. He will bring the blind—that's me—by a way they know not, ay, that's His own promise ; and He loves both of you children, too, He does. He loved us from the beginning, before ever we loved Him. I've prayed often and often, ‘ O God ! show me myself and my need, show me Thyself and Thy love.’ And He answered my prayer, and showed me my need of a Saviour, and the intensity of the love of Jesus in dying for my sins and for the sins of the whole world. Many a day folks have passed by, I know they have, and turned away their faces from the old blind man, as a miserable object in whom they could see nothing to interest them—that's true enough, and no wonder—I don't want to blame 'em for it ; and, perhaps, they fancied I was thinking only of the sound of the paltry coppers that some kinder folks now and again dropped into my tin box, but I wasn't. No, they never guessed what was passing through my mind. I don't blame 'em ; how could they know ? Many and many a time, amidst all the noise and busy traffic of the streets, I've been listening to the voice of the Lord speaking to me through His Word by some text of the Bible

that has come back to me—p'raps 'twas a message of love, or mercy, or may be a warnin' message. I've reason to thank the Lord for His warnin' voice, that I have—it led me to love Him. The Bible's full of God's messages, if folks would only search for 'em. I pity the man who never hears God's voice speaking to him, even in his workshop or in the busy streets. Oftentimes folks will turn aside their heads from me, because, no doubt, they think me a miserable object they can't abear to look on; that isn't Christ-like. No, 'Jesus passeth by' was real good news for the poor blind man we read of in the Gospels. *He* didn't turn away from him or cross to the other side of the street; *He* had mercy on Him and said, 'Receive thy sight.' Ah! I shall never see in this world; but where I'm going I shall see Jesus with a smile of welcome on His face, and I shall shine forth renewed in His glory, through His merits, and hear His voice saying, 'Come, ye blessed,' and the very angels will rejoice over the miserable old blind man, as over a sinner that repenteth. They won't despise me, not a bit of it. no, no! There are last that shall be first, and there are first which shall be last, that's 'according to the mystery of His will' and His good pleasure; for He 'worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.'"

The old man paused. The effort was too much for his small stock of strength; he fell into a kind of doze. Peter and Bab could not understand all he said, but they thought he looked very happy, they had never seen him look a bit like it before; and yet his words sounded very solemn—quite as solemn as the words the missioner had

spoken that night in the Mission Hall. Neither of them spoke or moved; they were almost afraid to breathe, lest they should wake him.

Presently the old man roused himself and spoke again. He was conscious his hours were numbered, and he felt he had not said all he wanted to say to Peter and Bab. It was his last opportunity. He went on:—

“Be good, try to be good children; do as well as ever you can, and God will help you and give you another chance. Jesus loves children now just as much as He did when He took ‘em up in His arms and blessed them. A child’s soul is as precious in His sight as the soul of grown-up people. Never mind your ragged clothes, He takes no account of fine clothes; never mind your poor bodies, they’ll die—your souls can’t die. I don’t know how to explain it, or make it clear to you, I haven’t the learnin’ to do it; but this I do know, that where it says in the Bible, ‘Thou shalt *not* surely die,’ it didn’t mean our *bodies*, but our souls. ’Twill help you to be good if you remember that. Your soul—that’s *you*—can’t die like your body, but will live for ever, either in happiness or misery. Be good. *Try* to be good, and God Almighty bless ye both——”

He paused. Presently he added:—

“Here’s my fiddle, Peter; I shan’t want it any more; —take it to the gentleman—you’ll want a friend when I’m gone. He said you was to go to him. Bab’s got a mother. You’ve both been good and kind to me. All your little acts of love and kindness will have their reward in that day when Jesus will say: ‘Inasmuch as ye

did it unto the poor old blind man, ye did it unto *Me*.' Only you didn't know anything about that."

Bab and Peter stayed on with old Figis till it was quite late. It was weary waiting for them, for he never spoke again. At last they guessed he was gone: and so he was, never to come back.

* * * *

Through the silent, deserted streets Peter and Bab went together to Bab's home. The night was damp, raw, and misty. The cold, wet pavements reflected the dull, leaden tints of the sky overhead, and accorded with the dreamy sense of loss in their own hearts.

* * * *

'Only another parish funeral, only another pauper gone to his last home,' was the thought that passed through most minds when they noticed the shabby hearse—if, indeed, they noticed such an every-day spectacle at all. It did not concern them, and so they hurried on, and the rusty vehicle dragged itself and its freight of death slowly along towards its destination.

Had any one cared to look they would have seen in the dark corners of the small vehicle joined on to the hearse for the use of mourners two pale-faced, ragged children, Peter and Bab, chief and only mourners. They wanted so much to go to the grave with the poor old man; but it was a hard matter to manage, although they were ready and waiting at the door of the lodging-house when the hearse drove up.

"The parish don't take no account of such mourners as you," said the driver, looking down from the driving-

box and eyeing the children. "If they allowed all the ragged little 'uns to go as said they had a fancy for goin' to burials as mourners and such-like, there would be no end of 'em, and no want of next-o'-kin to follow for the look of it. The parish don't go in for show—folks die, and we've got to bury 'em, that's all."

"It's the old blind man that's dead," urged Bab; "and he hadn't nobody belonging to him but us."

"And Dan," put in Peter. "But Dan's a dog, and—"

"You ain't no relation to the party inside, I suppose? You ain't a match to each other, either."

"No, we're nothin' to nobody," said Bab; "but we do want so much to go. I'll give you all my winks, and they're nice and fresh, if you will take us."

"Oh, well! that's a fair enough offer," said the man; "jump in, and be quick about it, too. I'm, as you may say, rayther partial to winks; they won't be bad to eat as a diversion as we goes along. Don't trouble about puttin' 'em into paper; I'll pop 'em just as they be into my coat pocket."

Among other unnamed and unremembered grass-grown graves they laid old Figis' body down to rest.

It all seemed and sounded very dismal to poor Peter and Bab—the rattling of the dry, stony earth as spadefuls fell in heavy thuds on the coffin; but just at that moment the sun shone out brightly through a rift in the dark clouds, and they wondered if *he* was shining bright as that in glory up above! He told them he should.



Life went on much as usual with Bab and Peter, only they both felt all the poorer and more lonely now the old blind man was gone. They never liked to pass by the place where he sat, it looked so dreary and empty. Just at first people wondered what had become of the blind man and his dog; but they soon became accustomed to his absence, and so he and Dan dropped out of memory. And the world went clanging on, as if there were no dead, no mourners!

CHAPTER XI

TO THE RESCUE



HERE was a lurid red light in the sky overhead. Not bright enough to dull even the pale, sickly gas-lights; but it was an ominous glow, and told plainly enough of a fire, and not very far off either. Clouds of smoke, warm-tinted, were soon seen mounting slowly in dense volumes above the dingy roofs of the thickly-crowded-together streets.

Peter and Dan were on their way to Bab's home, Dan close to Peter's heels. The dog cared for nothing now, all spirit had died out of his life. Peter carried the old blind man's fiddle in his hand; he was going to leave it for Bab to take charge of to-night: to-morrow he meant to take it to the gentleman, according to the old man's wish.

How much often happens between *now* and *to-morrow*! This was not the sort of thing that was passing through Peter's mind. His quick, searching eyes were fixed on the ground at his feet, or scanning the gutter. He rarely looked up at the sky above,—

there was nothing to be gained from clouds, they never rained treasures of odds and ends; but gutters did seem to sometimes.

He happened to look up into the sky to-night, and it struck him that there was something very queer in it. He stopped and fixed his eyes on the rolling, murky smoke. He sniffed a good long sniff. He could smell nothing but smoke; it seemed to get down his throat and almost take away his breath. He said to himself, "It's a fire, and not so very far off." Peter stood still and listened. He fancied he heard a confused murmur and buzz, as of many voices, and the hurrying to and fro of a lot of persons.

"I'll go and have a look at it," said Peter to himself. "It won't take long. Bab must wait a bit for me. She knows I'm comin' somewhen. If she's impatient and gets tired of waiting, I can't help it; boys that haven't no watches can't be expected to be what she'd call punctual."

Peter had no more time for thinking or talking to himself about Bab, for he heard a distinct and not far distant cry of "Fire!" He ran off as quickly as he could go in the direction of the sound of the voices. Strangely enough he was going exactly the way which led to Bab's home. On and on he went, till one more sharp turn in the street brought him to the scene of the fire itself. Crowds filled the spot. The fire-engines were doing their work well, and the brave firemen were ready to give their own lives a sacrifice for others, if it need be.

Tongues of fire were just pricking their angry way through the roof. Peter looked again and again at the house. The smoke seemed to be bursting through every window. He could not be mistaken, it was the very house in which Bab and her mother lodged! Where were they? Their room was at the very top of the house, four stories up, and the fire was growing fiercer and fiercer every moment.

Peter pushed his way fearlessly through the dense, surging crowd into the stifling atmosphere. Nothing would stop him, and no one tried to. There was a piercing cry: it rang clearly through the noise and din. Only a woman's voice, but strong with the strength of a mother's love—a mother's heart-agony: "A child upstairs,—my Bab!"

A boy is seen dashing into the house—no one knew who Peter was. Before the firemen could follow, or get to the upper story, he bore Bab downstairs in his arms, amid deafening cheers. Bab was safe, but Peter fell fainting into the arms of one of the firemen. He heard nothing of the ringing cheers, nothing of the applause so bravely but hardly earned.

In an unconscious, almost dying state, they carried poor Peter to the nearest hospital. The house-surgeon looked very grave, and shook his head. The shock to the system was so severe it would be next to impossible to bring him round.

Peter was hanging between life and death, perfectly unconscious; but perhaps the loud voices cheering him were ringing in his ears, and the glare of the raging

flames blinding his eyes. His small stock of strength hardly weighed anything in the balance.

Bab and her mother were taken in an exhausted, half-unconscious state to a house away from the noise and confusion of the fire. Bab remembered nothing, it was all so sudden and so horrible, like a moment of agony in a terrible dream. She was told she owed her life to Peter. Nobody knew what had become of him. Bab thought he had run away—he was such an odd boy—because no one should know he had saved her.

Even afterwards Bab said it dazed her brain to think of the fire. She recollected seeing Dandie just as Peter caught her up in his arms. She was sure he had the fiddle in his hand. But nobody saw either the dog or the fiddle again. They must have perished in the flames!

A heavy cloud of sorrow brooded over Bab and her mother after they heard the truth about poor Peter's condition.

Bab almost cried her eyes out when she thought of all he had suffered for her sake, and that probably he would lose his life to save hers.

She cried bitter tears. What more could she do? The tenderness of a child could go no further, it was not to be expected. So after a while she left off crying, and once more went out to sell her winks. She will have to sell a good many too, and her mother must work hard and half through the night at the fur caps, for she had lost everything—her little all, tables and chairs—in the terrible fire.

She knew God's hand was behind this heavy trial, and she believed He could and would direct it or clear it away as He saw best: still, it was an anxious, heart-rending time for the poor woman.

Every day Bab walked up and down in front of the hospital where Peter was still lying, perfectly unconscious. She cried "Winks! Winks O!" as loud as she could, hoping he might catch the sound of her voice and know she was outside, and thinking of him; but the poor boy noticed nothing: to him all the world was silent as the grave.

* * * * *

At last, after waiting long and patiently, Bab and her mother were allowed, for the first time, to see Peter. His poor, pale face looked wan and worn, and his hands so thin and white. In his eyes there was the far-off look of one destined to die early. Bab could not believe it was really Peter. Her mother shook her head and looked at the nurse as if she meant to say, "He can't live long"; but a smile on the nurse's face seemed to speak of hope.

At first Peter did not take the least notice of them. His hollow eyes wandered about the ward as if in search of somebody he wanted and could not find. He seemed to be trying to make out where he was.

It has been said that the mention of one's own name is a bell we usually answer. Of course, Bab knew nothing of the saying, but she leant over him, and, with a voice full of tenderness and hope that he must remember her, she said,—

"Peter! Peter! You *can't* have forgotten Bab?"

For an instant the poor boy's eyes ceased to wander aimlessly from side to side, and he fixed them steadily on Bab's face. A faint smile, the first, flitted over his lips. He stretched out his hand feebly, then laid it imploringly outside the bed for Bab to take it in hers. The spell was broken! He faintly whispered "Bab."

The nurse said Bab had done the very best thing to bring his mind back. Nobody had thought of calling him "Peter."

* * * * *

The time spent in the hospital was quite a new experience for Peter. He had never known what it meant to have plenty of good food, a nice clean bed—in a word, everything he could desire. It was like a dream of another life. He was not the least dull or lonely. Bab and her mother came to see him as often as they could on visiting days; besides, he always seemed to have so much to think over: the poor old blind man, and those last words he had said to him about being good, trying to be good. The nurse called him a good boy because he was so patient, and took his medicine, and obeyed her. All that was easy enough; but he thought if he ever went out of the hospital and lived his old life in the streets it would be very difficult to be good, because then he would be his own master, with nobody to obey, and no need of patience, no need to take any more medicine.

Then he tried to remember all he had heard in the

mission hall about the Fatherhood of God, that God was really and truly his Father. This made him feel very happy, for he was sure, now he was sick and weak, his Father would watch over him by day and by night,—both when he was awake and when he slept. He felt certain his Father could not be very far off. He must be somewhere very near, because He loved the sick and the dying,—there were so many such in the hospital. He would never leave them alone to take care of themselves and suffer pain without coming to help them bear it. And Jesus would have to come, too, and put His hands on the little children and bless them, just as He did years ago when He was living in the world. He would be there to whisper into the ears of the sick and sorrowing, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” Peter knew all this, because the chaplain had said so one day when he was speaking to the sick people in the ward, and the words of the hymn he read to them were almost the same,—

“He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.

‘ Oh dearly, dearly has He loved!
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.”

So Peter learned another lesson in the only thing worth knowing.

The living seed was in his heart, only waiting for some fostering influence—the power and influence of God's Holy Spirit—to cause it to spring up and grow.

At last the day came for Peter to leave the hospital. He was quite well, and almost as strong as ever. How glad Bab was to have him all to themselves again! All unknown to him, Bab's mother had hired a little lodging for him in the same house they lived in. Peter said he was sure he could earn enough to pay for it. Bab laughed when he told her this. He did not see anything to laugh at, and said so, rather pettishly, and then Bab could not keep her secret any longer. The gentleman who was to have had the old man's fiddle had heard all about the fire, and Peter's brave rescue of Bab, and the loss of Dan and the fiddle, and had arranged for the little room to be hired and paid for by him. A nice, useful suit of clothes was there ready for Peter to put on, and he was to go on with "his trade," umbrella mending, so that he might be able to do something to keep himself. It was all so very kindly arranged. He felt sure his Father in heaven must have put it into the gentleman's heart to do it! Peter's only sorrow was that poor Dandie had perished in the burning house. Peter never liked to talk or even think of the faithful dog's sad end.

* * * * *

Years have passed away since then. Peter is a young man. His trade is a reality now, and is, in its small way, a flourishing concern. Bab has learnt to cover

umbrellas to the satisfaction of all his customers. She is such a help, he cannot get on without her. He told her so one day. She did not know what to say in reply, so she said nothing: she only hung her head and stitched faster and faster still. Peter guessed it all meant "Yes," and so it did. It was some time before Bab could lift her eyes from the old umbrella she was covering. She did at last,—their eyes met, and all was settled, without words.

Love such as theirs for each other could never change or even wax cold, never grow old and die.

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